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LÆLIUS AND *HORTENSIA*;

OR,

THOUGHTS

ON THE

NATURE AND OBJECTS

OF

TASTE AND GENIUS,

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS

TO TWO FRIENDS.

by Dr Sledman

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N. B. When Gaſpar Pouſſin is found in the following Letters, *read* Nicolas Pouſſin.

LÆLIUS

AND

HORTENSIA.

LETTER I.

To Lælius.

SINCE your departure I have frequently been conſcious of a blank; and more eſpecially in being deprived of the opportunities of imparting to you, whether in common converſation or otherwiſe, ſome branches of literary knowledge which I had myſelf acquired many years ago, and in which I uſed thus agreeably to refreſh my memory. I am diſpoſed to be-

lieve that I have not been unſucceſsful in my endeavours to lead your young mind inſenſibly into that line of rectitude and propriety of conduct, which, while they recommend us to the ſociety of others, tend to preſerve an internal tranquillity, and to cheriſh in the mind that ſatisfaction, without which felicity cannot, and ought not to ſubſiſt. Among other ſubjects of ſpeculation, ſome ſentiments relating to taſte, figuratively underſtood, and its objects, were occaſionally interchanged. As theſe thoughts were, for the moſt part, crude and unconnected, I mean to convey to you, in a few letters, my ideas on theſe ſubjects ſomewhat better digeſted. Theſe, however, you are to conſider only as gleanings from a vaſt field. Such as they are, they may perhaps ſerve as a groundwork for a future ſtructure, more ample and regular.

In ſome circumſtances you will find my ſentiments not to coincide with thoſe of others; and, though the differences be ſome-

ſometimes conſiderable, I would not have you attach yourſelf to any author, not even to myſelf, ſo as not to examine truth with candour and abſolute impartiality; nor are you to expect to find in theſe few ſketches complete information. On the contrary, they are intended to draw on to farther inquiries, to whet, not to ſatiate the appetite. It ſhall be gratifying to me to find, that the accurate peruſal of theſe letters has led you to make new obſervations, to ſtart doubts, or to deduce conſequences.

I would not recommend to you to examine the nature of taſte, from an abſtract or metaphyſical inquiry into the faculties of the mind. Such inveſtigations are frequently deluſive, and are apt, by a plauſibility, to miſlead ſuperficial readers; while they prove unſatisfactory to others more accurate and philoſophical. I have long thought the too minute and too ſubtile diviſions of the powers of the mind have rendered them leſs intelligible. Nature conſtantly proceeds

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by the ſhorteſt and plaineſt methods; never purſuing by-ways, while a direct and obvious path lies before her. As we conceive the nature of the human mind to be ſimple and uncompounded, ſo have we reaſon to believe its powers and faculties to be. The diviſion of the mental faculties, which ſeem leaſt open to objection, is into active and paſſive. When an infant opens its eyes, its mind is impreſſed with the idea of light. This idea, however fleeting in that early period, is juſtly termed perception, and is then of the ſimpleſt kind. The mind, being, in like manner, impreſſed with different objects, inſenſibly acquires a power of comparing its ideas and thus becomes active, having before this been as paſſive as wax under the ſeal.

The terms judging, diſcerning, reflecting, and perhaps ſome others, have been treated as expreſſive of different faculties of the mind; and yet, altogether, they ſeem to be no more than that power, act, or faculty

culty of the mind by which it compares its ideas: And thus the mind, by collating, diſcriminating, or comparing its ideas, is enabled to diſcover their differences from, agreements with, and relations to one another. But the operation of the mind in effecting this diſcovery is, in other words, to judge, diſcern, or reflect: And in this exertion, the mind is ſometimes figuratively, and with propriety, ſaid to weigh or balance its ideas. A promptitude and preciſion in examining and comparing ideas, is what conſtitutes ſagacity, ſound judgment, and right reaſon.

But, however active the mind may be in comparing its ideas, it ſometimes happens, that the differences or agreements of propoſitions are ſo obvious as to appear inſtantaneouſly to the mind, as thoſe of material objects often ſtrike the eyes upon immediate inſpection. But impreſſions thus made, or where exertions of the mind are not in any degree requiſite, are to be conſidered as

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mere perceptions, even though the ideas conveyed be ſometimes of the complex kind.

The laſt ſtep, proceeding, or, as it is commonly, though improperly, called act of the mind, is aſſent, which is abſolute, when undeniable truths are diſcovered, as in geometrical deductions. Here the mind becomes again paſſive. I can no more deny my aſſent to the evidence of the Pythagorean theorem, than I can reſiſt the impreſſions of light, or of external objects upon the ſenſory. But, as the mind is not always able to diſcover, with certainty, the differences, agreements, or relations of its ideas, in place of abſolute aſſent, its degrees of credit come to be proportioned to thoſe of its evidence, which, from the loweſt degree of probability to the higheſt approximation to mathematical certainty, are infinite. Theſe three faculties of the mind, perception, that of comparing ideas, and aſſent, make up the great lines, under which all its powers and operations are included.

included. This, as it is the ſimpleſt, hath always appeared to me, and I ſpeak only for myſelf, the moſt comprehenſive, unexceptionable, and ſatisfactory diviſion of the mental faculties.

Taſte will likewiſe be found diviſible into paſſive and active. The former I denominate *inſtinctive*, the other *acquired*. Two perſons, having never ſeen any habitation better than a mean hut, are brought at once to ſee two ſuperb buildings, the one of Grecian, the other of Gothic architecture. One of theſe perſons is inſtantly ſtruck with the beauty and elegance of the former edifice. His fellow, after long balancing, decides in favour of the Gothic pile. But having ſtudied the nature and deſign of architecture, he comes to diſcover the columns here to be too ſlender for the bulky ſuperſtructure, and that the profuſion of minute ornaments is loſt, when the building is viewed from a proper diſtance. He farther learns, that the Grecian pillars and arches are proportioned to the weight they are deſtined

deſtined to bear; and that the ornamental parts are ſo conducted as to appear ſufficiently, when the eye is ſo far removed as to take in the whole building. In the former of theſe perſons, taſte is inſtinctive; in the latter, acquired.

It may be doubted, whether any perſon, poſſeſſing the powers of reflection, be abſolutely void of taſte; and, as a ſmall ſeed produceth a large tree, ſo may a ſmall degree of taſte be highly improved. It may, therefore, be obſerved, that by activity here applied to taſte, no more is meant than the exertion of the mind in the acquiſition or improvement of this faculty; for the term activity can hardly be applied to taſte, when conſidered abſtractly. This diviſion of taſte into inſtinctive and acquired, depends upon the internal ſtate of the mind. We ſhall afterwards ſee, that taſte admits of another twofold diviſion, ariſing from external objects. But, before proceeding farther on the ſubject of taſte, it will be proper to inquire what is meant by this term.

LETTER II.

To Lælius.

IN philoſophical inveſtigations, eſpecially thoſe of a more abſtract nature, accurate and unexceptionable definitions are of ſingular importance. Readers are entitled to expect from an author an explanation of the term or terms which make the ſubject of his inquiries; and, more eſpecially, if the ſenſe of theſe hath been controverted. This is not the leſs neceſſary, that authors, though of conſiderable merit, have ſometimes treated ſubjects, their ideas of which have, in the courſe of their works, appeared to be uncertain and vague. It would be an eaſy matter to produce examples in ſupport of this obſervation. The term *idea* itſelf, as defined by Plato, is widely different from Mr Lock's definition of it. Theſe

two celebrated philoſophers have, perhaps, adhered, with ſufficient accuracy, to their reſpective definitions: But, certain it is, that many authors, ſince the days of Plato, and even of Mr Locke, have uſed that term ſo licentiouſly, that, had they been called upon for a definition of it, they would have found it difficult, if not impoſſible, to render it intelligible, either to themſelves or to their readers. I cannot, therefore, help diſſenting from thoſe authors who treat definitions with neglect, or who condemn them, as tending to circumſcribe a bold and liberal genius in its exertions. If an author feel himſelf fettered by his definitions, we may preſume on the truth of one of the two following circumſtances: Either the definitions themſelves are faulty, or the author, impatient of reſtriction, wiſhes to make excurſions beyond the limits of his ſubject. It muſt be owned, however, that, from the imperfection of language, it is not always an eaſy matter for an author to expreſs himſelf with ſuch preciſion

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in the courſe of treating his ſubject, as not to ſeem to depart from the ſenſe which he had affixed to it at his ſetting out. Sir Iſaac Newton, though diſtinguiſhed for accuracy, frequently ſpeaks of the action of matter; by which he, for the moſt part, means no more than preſſure or reſiſtence, ariſing from its *inertia:* For that philoſopher never aſcribed activity to matter; nothing being more contrary to his principles.

We frequently find it a difficult matter to define terms, though theſe have been long familiar to us, and, therefore, believe ourſelves well acquainted with their ſignifications. This is the caſe, perhaps, with none more than with the word *taſte*, when applied to the human mind. Hence the various definitions of it by different authors. Without examining any of theſe, we may conſider taſte, thus figuratively taken, as conſiſting in the ready perception of, and pleaſure ariſing from propriety, fitneſs, or harmony,

harmony, whether in things of the natural world, in the common manners and cuſtoms of mankind, or in works of art and of ſcience. There are few definitions ſo happily framed, as not to include words which ought likewiſe themſelves to be defined. It may be here aſked, what are propriety, fitneſs, and harmony? For a ſolution of this queſtion, we can do no better than look into the works of nature, particularly into animal and vegetable bodies; in the various organizations of which, we find the different parts mutually ſubſervient and co-operating to the ſame end. Having drawn our ideas of fitneſs and propriety from the vaſt fountain of Nature, we readily transfer and apply theſe to whatever elſe can be ſuppoſed objects of taſte. Horace, ſenſible that Nature is the great ſtandard of taſte, judiciouſly opens his Art of Poetry with a bold ſketch of an ideal monſter, ſo diſproportioned as to be unfit for motion, or for the enjoyment of animal life. The poet, applying this to unharmo-

unharmoniſed compoſitions, of whatever kind, lets us immediately into his deſign.

We may trace the progreſs of taſte in the human mind, as well as that of its other faculties. It hath been obſerved already, that, in the earlier period of infancy, the mind is wholly paſſive. From this ſtate to childhood, it inſenſibly ſlides into action; and being ſtimulated by curioſity, natural to all children, it acquires, by ſlow degrees, faint ideas of ſymmetry and proportion. Thus children are conſtantly ſolicitous to undo their play-things, that they may ſee how and of what they are conſtructed. The fitneſs and ſubſerviency of the various parts of the ſame object are ſeldom perceived by the mind, ſo as to excite pleaſure, till it hath acquired a conſiderable degree of maturity, eſpecially if theſe parts be ſomewhat complicated.

Such is the affinity of taſte with the pleaſures of the imagination, that ſome have held

held their degrees of refinement to be always equal in the ſame perſon. Others would make them reſolvable into one another. It is, indeed, not improbable, that thoſe who are poſſeſſed of a taſte highly refined, enjoy likewiſe the pleaſures of the imagination in an exquiſite degree. Daily occurrences afford opportunities by which we can judge of the taſte of others. But, with reſpect to the pleaſures of the imagination, we can only judge of our own; nor have we reaſon to believe, that the degrees of refinement of theſe two are invariably equal in the ſame perſon. Two perſons examine two ſtatues, unequal both in workmanſhip and proportion of parts. One of theſe perſons reaps as great a degree of pleaſure from the ſtatue of inferior merit, as the other from that more exquiſitely wrought. But, becauſe the pleaſure ariſing to theſe two perſons from viewing the ſtatues is equal, we cannot, therefore, conclude their taſte to be equally refined. The compoſitions of Telemachus and of Gil Blas

Blas might, for ought we know, have yielded an equal degree of pleaſure to their reſpective authors. But we cannot perſuade ourſelves that Le Sage was poſſeſſed of a taſte equally refined with that of Fenelon.

It may be obſerved, that the pleaſures of the imagination may be underſtood either as the cauſe or the effect; either as the ſenſe of pleaſure excited in the mind, or as the objects which give riſe to that ſenſe. There is hardly a mind capable of reflection, that doth not poſſeſs the faculty of the imagination in one degree or other. With ſome, however, it is reſtricted and barren; with others, enlarged, fruitful, regular, and active. The former of theſe is ſenſible to pleaſure as well as the other. But thoſe who have written on this ſubject have generally underſtood by the pleaſures of the imagination, ſuch objects as are beſt ſuited to afford pleaſure to imaginations of the latter kind.

Mr

Mr Addiſon obſerves, that the pleaſures of the imagination are more refined than thoſe of the ſenſes, and leſs than thoſe of the underſtanding. With due deference to ſo reſpectable authority, it doth not appear with what propriety the pleaſures of the imagination can be ſaid to be leſs refined than thoſe of the underſtanding. Language is not always ſo copious as to furniſh words for different ideas, when theſe have a near affinity with one another. This ſeems to be the caſe with the two kinds of pleaſure mentioned. When we contemplate a magnificent and juſtly proportioned building, or when we read the works of Homer and of Virgil, we are conſcious of a pleaſure, the degrees of which will be according to the beauty of the edifice, and the poetical merit of the authors. Again, when we project a difficult enterpriſe, purſue the deſign, and at length effectuate an intereſting purpoſe, or when we inveſtigate the works of Euclid and of Archimedes, the mind is gratified,

and

and the degree of gratification will be in proportion to the importance of the end gained, and of the truths diſcovered. But it is evident, that the pleaſure ariſing from the two former cauſes, is of a different kind from that of the other two. In the caſe of the edifice and the poets, the mind is wholly paſſive, and the imagination feels a temporary and enthuſiaſtic pleaſure: In the other it is active, a laborious exertion being neceſſary. It doth not, however, appear that we ought to conclude the pleaſure of the imagination, in the one caſe, to be leſs refined, than that of the underſtanding in the other. Whether the latter may be found the more ſubſtantial and permanent of the two, I ſhall not contend. Be that as it may, we have the beſt reaſon to believe, that a rich imagination, regulated by a correct judgment, and ſupported by ſtrength of genius, is no leſs productive of the moſt rational pleaſure, than it evinces the moſt refined taſte.

LETTER III.

To Lælius.

BEAUTY, a word in every body's mouth, and of the meaning of which we never believe ourſelves ignorant, till we come to inquire into its nature, hath undergone many diviſions, and been variouſly characteriſed. In animal bodies, ſome would make it to conſiſt in littleneſs, or what is relatively ſo; in ſmoothneſs; in the members ſliding eaſily into one another, without corners or angles; and in colouring rather faint than ſtrong. There are many animals, it is true, whoſe beauties correſpond to theſe marks; but others, particularly thoſe of the ſmaller kinds, though thus characterised, cannot lay claim to beauty, but excite diſguſt. The weaſel and the dormouſe have been often kept for their beauty;

beauty; but the newt, though poſſeſſing the preceding characters, and having the advantage of a ſmall ſize, is univerſally diſliked.

Mr Hogarth, in his ingenious analyſis of beauty, obſerves, that lines in form of, or ſimilar to the Italic *S*, pleaſe more than lines in any other direction. Hence he calls that the line of beauty; and it will be found, conſiſtent with his obſervations, that, where lines of this kind can, without impropriety, be introduced into works of art, or where they appear in works of nature, theſe will pleaſe more than objects which abound with lines of other directions. This being admitted, and likewiſe ſimplicity and variety as requiſites, beauty, if I miſtake not, will admit of illuſtration from the following fourfold diviſion:

1. Simple or ſuperficial beauty.

2. Beauty depending in part, or wholly, on proportion.

3. Beauty

3. Beauty ariſing from utility.

4. Ornamental beauty, or that which is acceſſory, but not eſſential to the object.

The impreſſions of the firſt kind of beauty on the mind are ſimilar to the perceptions of children; and no exertion of the mind being neceſſary, it is here wholly paſſive, as when we look at a fine complexion, the ſmooth ſurface of poliſhed marble, the water and luſtre of diamonds, the rays of the ſun, exhibiting the original colours on a wall by the interpoſition of a priſm, and the like objects.

Proportion, of itſelf, proves an ample ſource of beauty. The example of Grecian and Gothic architecture, almoſt conſtantly referred to when taſte and beauty are in queſtion, will ſerve our purpoſe here. A perſon of a refined taſte will immediately diſcover the ſuperior beauty of the former, ariſing from proportion alone, and without conſidering, or having it in his power to know

know the convenience of either. Yea theſe ornamental parts of architecture, which are neither ſubſervient to conveniency, nor to the ſtrength of the building, are known to poſſeſs much beauty, which would be loſt, were the magnitude of theſe parts, with reſpect to that of the other members, to be changed, even in a moderate degree. Obeliſks are intended for beauty alone. Of three obeliſks, let one be ſo tall and ſlender that we can hardly look at it, much leſs approach it, without dreading its fall. Let another be of a ſhort, thick, and ſomewhat pyramidal form. An obeliſk of a proportion between theſe two will be found to be the moſt beautiful; nor will a high degree of taſte be requiſite to diſcover the ſuperiority; and ſo of many other objects intended to pleaſe ſolely by the proportion of their parts. Hence Horace's obſervation relating to rectitude may be applied to the works of nature and of art, as well as to human actions.

Eſt modus in rebus; ſunt certi denique fines,
Quos ultra citraque nequit conſiſtere rectum *.

I am aware that proportion is ſaid by ſome to be in no reſpect conducive to beauty, and they who would reprobate it, tell us, that, were this admitted, the ſcience of mathematics ought to diſcover much beauty, ſince it abounds with the juſteſt proportions †. If mathematical diagrams be here meant, it is evident we are not to look for beauty in their proportional parts, farther than they ſerve to aſſiſt the mind in tracing the various ſteps, and often painful inveſtigations, in queſt of truth. But whatever ſatisfaction the mind may reap from this branch of ſcience, few will expect to find beauty there, unleſs it be in the ſenſe of the antient philoſopher, that truth is the moſt beautiful thing in the world. Definitions

* Some certain mean in all things may be found,
To mark our virtues, and our vices bound.—FRANCIS.

† A Philoſophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.

nitions are never more neceſſary than when we diſſent from opinions generally received. Proportion is applicable to quantity, of whatever kind, as time, ſpace, numbers; but, in the caſe now before us, only to material objects; and here I underſtand proportion to be that relation of quantities and forms, whether in different objects, or in the different parts of the ſame object, which is found productive of certain effects intended by, or reſulting from that relation. In all natural organized bodies, and in many works of art, particularly in mechanics, that proportion of parts is the beſt, by which the effects intended are produced in the beſt manner, and to the beſt purpoſe. Thus far we have a ſtandard for the juſteſt proportions. But, where the ſole effect intended is to impreſs the mind with an idea of beauty, we cannot always give a reaſon why one proportion is preferable to another, further than common conſent. The Voluta of the Ionic capital, when of a certain magnitude and form, conveys the idea of beauty.

beauty. But, were it three or four times larger, or as many times leſs, with reſpect to the other members, this effect would fail: And we can give no other reaſon but general conſent, why this cauſe ſhould invariably produce this effect. With reſpect to mathematics, or to abſtract and metaphyſical deductions, they are but ill ſuited to illuſtrate the ſubject before us. If we look into the fountain of nature, we ſhall not be diſappointed.

The geometrical oeconomy of the univerſe, or of ſo much of it as falls within the ſphere of our obſervation, hath, eſpecially ſince the diſcoveries of the moderns, been conſidered as exhibiting much beauty. But this kind of beauty, as well as that ariſing from the mutual ſubſerviency to be obſerved in the organical parts of animal and vegetable bodies, is widely different from that of objects which act immediately upon our inſtinctive paſſions or affections, in conſtituting which kind of beauty, proportion

portion hath been ſaid to have no ſhare. The paſſion of the ſexes, which obtains through the whole gradation of the animal kingdom, is univerſally allowed to be inſtinctive. With many of the inferior animals, this paſſion ſeems to be little felt, unleſs when it immediately ſtimulates them to a temporary gratification, for the propagation of their kinds. With man this affection of the mind, when more permanent and refined, is denominated love; and beauty is well known to be its object. Let a female countenance, juſtly laying claim to, and generally acknowledged to be poſſeſſed of exquiſite beauty, have one or other of its parts enlarged or diminiſhed. Let the fore-head, noſe, or chin, for example, loſe one third of their extent. Deformity will thus come in place of beauty. Again, let the other parts be contracted to this diminiſhed ſtate of any of the three juſt mentioned; and this countenance, immediately recovering its beauty, will be the ſame as before the change, when viewed at a

diſtance correſponding to the difference of ſize. Thus, if proportion and ſymmetry be not what ſolely conſtitute that kind of beauty which affects our inſtinctive feelings, they are, at leaſt, indiſpenſible in preſerving it.

The third diviſion of beauty is that which ariſeth from utility. Our ideas of proportion and beauty are frequently formed from utility alone; and this ought always to be the caſe, when things are ſo framed that all the parts co-operate in anſwering, in the beſt manner, the end for which they are intended. Let a man, born blind, be inſtantaneouſly reſtored to ſight. Let two men be ſet before him, the one athletic, and every way juſtly proportioned, the other of an aukward make, and wide of the common ſymmetry, only not diſtorted. Perhaps this laſt condition may be unneceſſary. The man lately blind, being aſked in which of theſe figures he ſees moſt elegance and beauty, cannot decide, knowing nothing

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of the matter. Nor even after the recovery of ſight, would any length of time enable him to judge, without ſeeing the human body in various actions and attitudes, by which alone he would learn what form is beſt ſuited to agility and the common functions of life, and would thus inſenſibly acquire ideas of proportion and beauty.

It may be obſerved here, that, in the caſe of an immediate recovery of viſion, images conveyed to the ſenſory by means of the eyes, cannot then be ſuppoſed to affect thoſe feelings which I have called inſtinctive, till the mind hath enjoyed the uſe of theſe organs for a due length of time. Thus, the man juſt mentioned could not, upon the recovery of ſight, judge between a beautiful female countenance and one hard favoured, though the difference ſhould be ſo great as to be ſtriking to every body elſe. It may, therefore, perhaps, be objected, that the word inſtinctive is too

ſtrong

ſtrong or poſitive to be applied to taſte. But the inſtinctive powers of the inferior animals, it is to be preſumed, are the ſame, in this reſpect, with thoſe of man. Theſe, by inſtinct, know the food which Nature hath intended for them. Were a brute to advance to maturity in a ſtate of blindneſs, and then to recover its ſight, this animal, we have reaſon to believe, would be unable, by viſion alone, to diſtinguiſh its proper food; that is, without the aſſiſtance of the taſte or the ſmell. In the caſe of the two perſons judging of the Grecian and Gothic buildings, mentioned in a former letter, no deciſion could have been given, had they only then, for the firſt time, got the uſe of their eyes. But a ſmall ſhare of knowledge and experience ſufficeth to qualify a perſon of an exquiſite taſte to diſtinguiſh the different degrees of beauty.

Ornamental beauty makes the fourth diviſion. The proportions to be found in nature, eſpecially when theſe are obviouſly attended

attended with utility, as they prove an ample ſource of beauty, are no leſs a ſure criterion of taſte. But, when ornaments are unconnected with conveniency, we are apt to give ourſelves up to the guidance of fancy and caprice. This appears from the ſuperfluous ornaments of our own dreſs, which meet with general approbation at one time, as being the reſult of a good taſte, but, when antiquated, are held ludicrous. We produce, as a vindication of our conduct here, the variegated coats of the inferior animals. But the uſes of the decorations of theſe animals, in which Nature is ſo profuſe, are unknown to us; and, being directed wholly by fancy, we are divided in our opinions, not only with reſpect to the degrees of beauty attending theſe ornaments, but, ſometimes, what one believes to be a beauty, another conſiders as a deformity. One, however, who hath been accuſtomed to phyſical inveſtigations, being diſpoſed to entertain an opinion that Nature does nothing in vain, will admire her even

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in thoſe operations which ſeem to be unattended with utility. It would be no leſs raſh than unphiloſophical to conclude the rich and regular colouring of a peacock's tail to be the mere ſports of Nature. For ought we know, the reciprocal attraction of the ſexes may originate here, or, at leaſt, be heightened by this ornamental figuring. They who take but ſuperficial and tranſient views of the works of Nature, will be apt to interpret her beſt deſigns as excentric vagaries.

LETTER IV.

To Lælius.

IN my laſt letter, I imparted my idea of the nature of beauty, and attempted an illuſtration of it by the means of a fourfold diviſion. I now mean to give you a few thoughts, tending to aſcertain the propriety of that diviſion; and to throw more light upon a ſubject which, being of difficult inveſtigation, hath been often agitated, much controverted, and which cannot perhaps be treated ſo happily as not to lie ſtill open to objections. In the few following paragraphs, connection being little neceſſary, will not be greatly attended to.

Proportion and utility together are what conſtitute fitneſs, and fitneſs is, with propriety, applied to whatever is ſo conſtructed as

as to anſwer, in the beſt manner, the end for which it is intended. Beauty, when applied to Nature, and taken in the moſt extenſive ſenſe, is what we here underſtand by fitneſs, and is obſerved to obtain through the material world, from the general oeconomy of the planetary ſyſtem to that of the ſmalleſt inſect or vegetable. But here a material diſtinction becomes neceſſary, that is, between beauties of the underſtanding, and beauties of the eye. By the latter, I underſtand thoſe beauties which, by the means of viſion, ſtrike the ſenſory with little, perhaps without any reflection of the mind. In the other caſe, a compariſon of ideas, or an exertion of the mind, in a greater or leſs degree, is requiſite. The latter are ſuited to minds of a philoſophical caſt, or ſuch as carry their inquiries to cauſes and effects; the other to thoſe minds which are ſatisfied with ſuperficial or ornamental beauty. Nature exhibits beauties no leſs in the organical conſtruction of the ſpider, the toad, or the whale, than in that of the gold-

finch,

finch, the parrot, or the peacock, their parts being equally ſuited to their different modes of life, the finding and digeſting food, the propagation of their kinds, and the like functions. But it is only the phyſical inquirer who ſees the beauties of Nature in the three former, ariſing from the proportion and utility of the reſpective organs.

Thus we have two kinds of beauty; the one depending wholly on the fancy or imagination; the other, having a firm baſis in Nature, is regulated by fixed and invariable laws. The former of theſe is hardly definable, and is nothing more than what pleaſes the fancy at the time, though the ſame object may, at no great interval, appear ugly, and become a cauſe of diſguſt: The other ariſes from that arrangement and proportion of parts by which the ſame, or different ends, are effected in the beſt manner. The former of theſe is fluctuating and uncertain; of the other, we have a ſure and invariable ſtandard. It is not

meant here, however, to depreciate the ſuperficial beauties either of Nature or of art. There are many flowers, birds, quadrupeds, and other productions of Nature, which are conſtantly and univerſally allowed to be beautiful, without regard to the ſubſervience of one organ to another.

In conſequence of the preceding diviſion of beauty, we deduce two kinds of taſte; the one ariſing from fancy alone, and unſupported by reaſon, as in certain arrangements of colours, the ornaments and form of our dreſs, particular airs of muſic, and many other objects affecting the different ſenſes, but chiefly the eye and the ear. Between theſe two ſenſes, a remarkable analogy hath been obſerved to obtain. As the taſte of ſome is confined to the ſuperficial beauties of Nature, and that of others extends to her internal oeconomy, ſo, in muſic, a ſimple air ſufficeth to pleaſe the taſte of one perſon, while that of another cannot be gratified without the harmony of the various parts.

If we obſerve the progreſs of the human mind, we ſhall find the former kind of taſte to prevail in our earlier years, and, as we advance in life, gradually yielding to the latter. Children are pleaſed with their play-things, however coarſe, and ſeem at firſt to wiſh for little more than ſtrong colouring. They afterwards learn, that beauty conſiſts in a more accurate imitation, whether of the works of Nature or of art. Utility comes at length to be joined to beauty; and, in our riper years, we inſenſibly eſtimate beauty from thoſe parts of Nature, in which the proportion, fitneſs, and harmony of the parts, that is, the mutual ſubſerviency of each to one or more ends, are conſpicuous. Hence thoſe whoſe minds are mechanically diſpoſed, ſoon acquire that kind of taſte which is ſupported by genius and judgment; while others of oppoſite diſpoſitions are obſerved to reach the lateſt periods of life, without diſcovering any other taſte than what depends on fancy alone.

Thus,

Thus, in acquiring, correcting, or improving taſte, it appears that the ſenſes, the imagination, and the judgment, have their ſhares, each of theſe inſenſibly taking the lead in its reſpective period of life; or, according to ſome temperaments, one or other of them is obſerved to predominate, and invariably to actuate the mind. In childhood, whether from the ſtate of the nerves in that early period, our feelings from the beauties of Nature are more delicate, and our pleaſure more exquiſite, than in the middle or later ſtages of life. The tumults to which every mind is expoſed, in a greater or leſs degree, before it acquire a power of abſtract reflection, render it leſs ſuſceptible of thoſe refined impreſſions, which it had ſpontaneouſly received when young, and almoſt in a paſſive ſtate. The paſſions, being often ruffled, communicate to it a calloſity, of which it is unable afterwards wholly to diveſt itſelf. As we advance in years, however, we find a compenſation for the loſs of theſe exquiſite feelings;

feelings; for the mind, having reached a greater maturity, inſenſibly learns to obſerve a fitneſs and ſymmetry in Nature, which had wholly eſcaped it before. This yields a pleaſure and a kind of beauty, well ſuited to a rational mind. While we walk in graſs fields, the wild daiſy appears every where. The beauty of this common and humble flower is not very attracting; but, when we obſerve, upon the approach of the cold and damps of the night, the radiated petals to riſe and collect themſelves over the tender central parts, we admire this oeconomy in Nature, which tends to heighten in our ideas the beauty of this ſmall flower.

So various is this oeconomy of Nature, in organized bodies, whether animate or inanimate, that we are in danger of being miſled in ſeeking for proportion and fitneſs in animals or plants, whoſe kinds are widely different. Accordingly ſome have produced this obſervation as an argument to prove

prove that proportion hath no ſhare in conſtituting beauty. We cannot diſcover the mutual ſubſerviency of the ſeveral members of the human body, by comparing them with thoſe of a whale; nor the ſymmetry of a tender ſhrub from that of a vigorous tree. The roſe is a large flower, on a long and ſlender, though tough and pliable ſtalk. Thus, by inclining or hanging downwards, its petals defend the ſeminal parts from the injuries of rain and other foreign bodies, till theſe central parts, acquiring firmneſs, the flower falls off, leaving them expoſed to the ſun and air, which then become neceſſary for their greater maturity. The oeconomy of trees is different from this. Their bloſſoms, though ſmall, are fixed either to the branches or to ſtrong peduncles, becauſe a weight of heavy fruit is afterwards to be ſupported. Here utility hath its ſhare in conſtituting beauty, to a mind addicted to reflection.

Numberleſs objects are daily preſented to us, tending to ſhow how far the utility of parts

parts conciliate the mind to what had at firſt excited ideas of diſproportion. One, who, in childhood, admires the magnificent tail and ſhining neck of the peacock, and laughs at the ſhort tails and long necks of the gooſe and the ſwan, will, in riper years, admire the order of nature in not loading water-fowls with long tails, and in providing them with necks ſuited to reach their prey.

All objects, whether natural or artificial, with reſpect to their influence upon the mind, may be divided into three kinds: Into thoſe which affect it with ideas of beauty; thoſe which are indifferent; and ſuch objects as excite our averſion. When we examine the fitneſs of the reſpective parts of theſe three kinds, we ſhall find our ideas of the firſt to be thereby heightened, as in the examples given above; the ſecond will acquire a degree of beauty which we had not diſcovered before; and our diſguſt to the laſt will either be diminiſhed or wholly

wholly extinguiſhed. Of all diſagreeable objects, none excite our abhorrence more than dead bodies of our own ſpecies; but thoſe who ſtudy anatomy, by reading, and the aſſiſtance of engravings, acquire ſo irreſiſtable a deſire to inveſtigate the various parts of the human body, and their uſes, by diſſections, that this natural diſguſt is wholly overcome. In like manner, they who purſue the ſtudy of comparative anatomy, loſe their averſion to many animals by diſſecting and examining the ſtructure of their bodies.

Theſe few obſervations, relating to proportion, utility, fitneſs, and, in general, to beauty, were deemed proper in ſupport of the definition of taſte, though in that definition the term *beauty*, being open to cavil, is intentionally avoided. Whether, therefore, the following definition of beauty be admitted as ſufficient, or rejected as faulty, I ſhall not conſider myſelf as greatly intereſted. Beautiful objects are ſuch as attract

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our liking, approbation, or admiration; or which excite pleaſure and complacency: Whether theſe effects on the mind ariſe from the external and ſuperficial appearance of the objects, or from the mutual ſubſerviency and co-operation of their various parts to one or more ends.

But beauty, however defined, is not the only object of taſte, as ſome have told us. Elegance and the ſublime have no leſs a claim. Many things are ſaid to be elegant, to which we cannot, with equal propriety, apply the epithet *beautiful*. One is ſaid to walk or dance elegantly, and ſo of other actions which are performed with readineſs, eaſe, and alacrity; and the negative term inelegance, is juſtly applied to the ſame actions, when in performing them we diſcover labour and embarraſſment.

That branch of the ſublime which excites in the mind ideas of power, and impreſſeth it with awe, melancholy, or hor-

ror, is a well known ſubject of taſte. We are here, however, to diſtinguiſh between the object and the deſcription of it. Virgil's account of the tempeſt, in which Æneas and his fleet were almoſt overwhelmed, is both beautiful and elegant; but neither of theſe terms can, with propriety, be applied to the tempeſt itſelf. The objects of taſte, therefore, if I miſtake not, are to be found in one or other of theſe three ample fields, the beautiful, the elegant, and the ſublime. But the mind cannot hope to find the ſame certainty in inquiries where the ſenſes and imagination are ſo much concerned, as in ſome phyſical, and in all mathematical truths, or in whatever elſe prove wholly objects of the underſtanding. Two or more perſons, though of the moſt refined taſte, may differ in their ſentiments about what is moſt beautiful, ſublime, or elegant. But the evidence that one's own mind exiſts and operates, or that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right

angles,

angles is irreſiſtible, and our aſcent neceſſary.

Hitherto, you will obſerve, beauty hath been conſidered as it is found in the works of nature and of art. You are not ignorant, that it is likewiſe often applied to moral ſentiment and action: Nor are theſe more happily illuſtrated than by figurative alluſions to the former. Yea, improprieties in the arts have an effect upon the mind not unlike to that of improprieties in moral actions. When we ſee one perſon, merely from a principle of friendſhip and native benevolence, ſupporting another in diſtreſs; while this other is, in every reſpect, ungrateful and inſenſible to ſo much goodneſs, we find in this, and in ſimilar examples of moral action, the ſame impropriety and want of harmony, as if we ſaw a ponderous and clumſy Gothic ſuperſtructure reſting upon a range of high finiſhed Corinthian or Ionic columns; and the diſagreeable impreſſions, upon a mind poſſeſſed

of

of a refined taſte, will be of the ſame kind, though, perhaps, different in degrees. As a balance to this, we may invert the obſervation. The juſtneſs of proportion in the members of architecture, the propriety of compoſition, of deſign, and of expreſſion in painting, and the harmony of the parts in muſic, acting upon the nerves and animal ſpirits, tend to ſooth, to exhilarate, to animate, by effects a-kin to thoſe of humane and friendly actions proceeding from a benevolent mind.

Thus far concerning the nature of taſte and ſome circumſtances connected with it. The fields in which the objects of taſte are to be found, have been already mentioned. Theſe are inexhauſtible. All that you are to expect in the following letters, is ſuch a delibation of each as may prove an inducement to further inquiries.

LETTER

LETTER V.

To Lælius.

WHEN we avail ourſelves of the works of Nature, and apply them to our profit or pleaſure, we find great latitude for taſte, inſomuch that its objects may be, in ſome reſpects, oppoſite; and yet the choice of one kind, or the rejecting of another, indicate no defect of good taſte. Thus, in chooſing grounds for a manſion-houſe, while one perſon is pleaſed with the neighbourhood of vaſt mountains, with the proſpect and din of cataracts of water, projecting rocks, or, in general, with the aſpect of Nature, majeſtically auſtere; another may prefer extended lawns, moderate declivities, lakes, and pools of water, or ſmooth running rivers. But we can no more declare the taſte of either of theſe to be bad, than we can conclude a preference

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of tragedy or of comedy to one another, to indicate a falſe taſte; which, however, we know to be common, and is of itſelf a good proof of the preceding obſervation; ſince tragedy and comedy are not only different from, but, in ſome reſpect, oppoſite to one another, whether we regard the nature of the compoſitions, the fables and ſcenery repreſented, or their terminations.

There are, however, few caſes which are not attended with circumſtances from which we may eſtimate taſte. To purſue the example of chooſing grounds for a manſion-houſe, we would conſider a mind defective in taſte which would voluntarily diſpenſe with a proper expoſure, due extent, fertility and variety. We could not fail to conclude one to have a falſe taſte, who ſhould prefer grounds inclining to the ſun in a ſcorching climate; or the oppoſite expoſure in a cold one. By extent is not here meant that boundleſs and indefinite extent of grounds which the human mind, eſpecially

cially when ſtimulated by avarice, is frequently known to crave; but ſuch an extent as is ſufficient for conveniency, pleaſure, and elegance, according to the ſize of the manſion-houſe, or the family it is ſuppoſed to accommodate.

In landſcapes, or rural ſcenery, a perſon of taſte can ill diſpenſe with variety; and particularly, with ſuch inequalities of ground as may prove ſubjects on which his taſte may operate. An extended and continued flat is known to yield little or no pleaſure to the eye. They who have been in the Low Countries muſt be ſenſible, that, were it not for the multiplicity of cities, villages, with towers riſing among trees, and particularly for the conſtant navigation through theſe countries by canals, the mind could find no entertainment, and would ſoon be diſguſted with the uniformity of the ſcene. Some, whoſe fate hath been to have their habitations on promontories, being accuſtomed to ſee little more than a vaſt ocean,

bounded

bounded by the ſky, have found this fatiguing to the mind, and productive of melancholy. Hence, a few centuries ago, it was not uncommon for people of a religious temperament, and who meant to devote their lives to penitential meditation, to chooſe ſuch ſituations for their monaſteries; being conſcious, that ſcenery much diverſified and gay, was wholly oppoſite to that internal contrition which they courted. There can hardly be a ſtronger proof of a falſe taſte, than, without any particular or uncommon motive, to make choice of ſuch a ſituation; ſince one is thus not only deprived of many opportunities of exerting both genius and taſte, but even of the periodical viciſſitudes of ſpontaneous vegetation, which the different ſeaſons preſent, and which are acknowledged to be among the nobleſt objects of taſte.

It hath been ſtated as a problem, in what manner can art be applied to nature to the greateſt advantage? As a ſolution to this, though

though perhaps not ſo univerſal as to be without exceptions, it may be obſerved, that we ſeldom or never apply art to nature more happily, than when we either preſerve in, or communicate to nature an artleſs appearance. It may be difficult to find a ſatisfactory reaſon why we ſhould wiſh our art, in improving nature, to lie concealed. Is it that we are better pleaſed that Nature ſhould appear to accommodate herſelf to our purpoſes ſpontaneouſly, than that violence ſhould be obviouſly neceſſary? Be that as it may, the application of art to nature is juſtly held a touchſtone of true taſte. If we mean, in rearing an oak, to bring it to a great ſize, we prune it, dig and manure the ground about its roots, and perhaps uſe force to render it ſtraight; but, after it hath acquired the moſt ſtately appearance, we ſtill wiſh it to be deemed wholly a child of nature, and to have had no other tutory. The whimſical faſhion of forcing trees into ſhapes of animals, or whatever elſe caprice ſuggeſted, was a proof

how far an abſurd taſte may prevail when we abandon nature.

LETTER VI.

To Hortensia.

HAVING digeſted ſome thoughts on the nature of taſte in a few letters to your friend Laelius, I mean them likewiſe for your peruſal. When he was with us, you was ſometimes preſent while the converſation turned on that ſubject, and you uſed to offer an occaſional ſentiment, though with that modeſty and reſerve which is ſo becoming and amiable in your ſex, and while, I truſt, ſhall ever have a ſhare in marking your character. A ſcientific information, in a matter ſo delicate and ſo much controverted as taſte, is not to be found in the period of life in which you and our friend were when he left us. But

I am diſpoſed to believe, that the volumes I have recommended for your peruſal, your natural docility, and a greater maturity of mind, joined with theſe few obſervations, will be ſufficient to overcome the difficulties attending this inquiry.

Among the different fields in which objects of taſte are to be found, that of Nature is not the leaſt ample. While we are yet in the firſt ſtage of childhood, we are delighted with the commoneſt flowers of the field. We look at them, handle them, and examine them with avidity. We are no leſs pleaſed, in that early period, with many kinds of animals, particularly with birds, and likewiſe with the young of the more inoffenſive quadrupeds, as lambs, puppies, kittens. Were theſe attachments cheriſhed from our childhood upwards, and were we, at the ſame time, removed from the more glaring parts of art, and from the various occurrences of life which divert the mind from the innocent and ſimple pleaſures

ſures of Nature, we would be inſenſibly directed to the culture of the earth, and to the care of ſuch animals as we ſhould find moſt for our uſe. Thus we ſhould have a reſtoration of the primeval paſtoral ſtate, in which the laborious exertions of the field would fall to the ſhare of our ſex; while you, as votaries of Pomona, would aſſume the more refined department of the garden. I know your attachment to the ſtudy of Nature, particularly to that of plants. Whilſt, therefore, you are occupied in the cultivation of your hyacinths, carnations, orange-trees, take the following ſketch relating to gardening.

Profit and pleaſure are known, even though ſeparate, to prove ſtrong inducements to action; but, when united, make the moſt powerful allurements of the human mind; nor ought we to reſiſt them, when we are conſcious the mind is directed to the attracting object, both by Nature and reaſon. To render a garden profitable, a fertility

fertility of ſoil, and a proper expoſure, are neceſſary, beſides which, pleaſure requires variety, and a ſufficient extent of ground.

It hath been repeatedly obſerved, that the happieſt application of art to Nature is, to give Nature an artleſs appearance. There is no branch of rural ſcenery in which we have it leſs in our power to conceal art, than in gardening. This is owing to the narrow limits within which gardens are commonly bounded. But, where thirty or forty acres, or upwards, can be allotted to pleaſure and garden-ground together, theſe being judiciouſly interſperſed, might exhibit not only a natural, but a grand and magnificent ſcene. From the extent of the ground, walks might be conducted to the various parts of the field, without the formality either of ſtraight lines, or in a regular ſerpentine courſe, but in an eaſy, and ſeemingly careleſs manner. In place of circular, ſquare, or oblong ponds, rills of water, conveyed as declivities or hollows might be

be found to invite, would have a more agreeable appearance, and be more convenient. Groves, at proper diſtances, as the nature of the ground might ſuggeſt, would diverſify and add to the elegance of the whole. Ornaments, as ſtatues, vaſes, urns, or the like objects, might be interſperſed, according to fancy. Theſe ornaments ſeldom fail to pleaſe young minds; and there is no reaſon why they ſhould be diſagreeable to the old, provided they be conducted with elegance and propriety. It would add much to the pleaſure and beauty of a field, thus diverſified, to be bounded, at leaſt on one ſide, by a river, ſufficiently broad and deep to make a fence on that part.

Though variety, whether of diſtant objects in the natural ſurface of the ground, or in the method of laying it out, be a circumſtance meriting particular attention, I would not therefore be ſo much attached to it, as to interſperſe corn-fields in pleaſure-grounds, as ſome have done; for, whatever

ever beauty corn-fields may poſſeſs at one ſeaſon of the year, ploughed ground and ſtubble are but chearleſs objects at other periods. Verdure is agreeable even in the middle of winter.

In ſuch extent and variety of ground, different kinds of ſoil, as well as different expoſures, will probably be found; as fat and gravelly, moiſt and dry, more or leſs warm; and a judicious gardener will know how to diſpoſe of theſe, according to the nature of his plants. Such ſpots of ground, too, as are leaſt expoſed to view, might be allotted to vegetables which become offenſive when they begin to decay.

In a field to be laid out in this manner, if Nature ſhould preſent any rude or bold object, it requires art and taſte to turn it to the beſt purpoſe. A perpendicular, projecting, or depending rock, affords no great beauty by itſelf. But, were a thicket of trees,

trees, with large and bushy tops, opposite to, and at a proper distance from it, to meet it above, this would form an arch, through which distant objects would appear to great advantage: And walks ought to be so directed, that strangers, turning suddenly towards this arch, might be struck with an agreeable surprise. Such a rock would likewise afford an opportunity of forming a grotto to serve as a retreat from rain or in sultry heats. But this ought rather to appear a natural cave, than to betray art by its regularity or ornaments. Such plants or shrubs as grow naturally on rocky grounds, being disseminated all around the rock and cave, would encrease the beauty. There is hardly an object so uncouth or mean, that a person of taste and art will not convert into beauty. Many of your sex have been known to excell in this department.

The pleasure and beauty of grounds, laid out in the preceding manner, will depend much upon the face of the adjacent country.

Woods,

Woods, rivers, lakes, navigable branches of the ſea, the diſtant proſpect of cities, of villages, with churches and towers riſing among trees, of ſtately buildings, of venerable ruins; the chearful appearance of meadows, lawns, and hills, enriched with flocks and herds, would diverſify the ſcene, and render the whole delightful.

If any diſtant object appear diſagreeable, as gloomy heaths, barren and uncultivated grounds, or the like ſcenery, it would be proper to cover theſe by tall and buſhy trees, planted towards the extremities of the pleaſure ground. Even the colours of theſe trees merit attention. The ſhading of the deep greens of the different kinds of pines, the yellow flowers of the liburnum, the light greens of the poplars and willows, with many others, may be ſo diſpoſed as to afford a variegation delightful to the eye. But as, in fields of this kind, we ſtudy chiefly grandeur, gaiety, and elegance, I would not recommend, for the ſake of variety, and

notwithſtanding the authority of Kent, ſuch objects as ſtunted, decayed, or thunderſtruck trees. Even a ruinous building would be ſeen to greater advantage, at a proper diſtance without the field, than within it. The ruins of ſuperb edifices have an influence in correcting the mind, ſimilar to that of tragedy; ſince they point out to us human frailty, and the inſtability of the greateſt works of man. But there is not the ſame reaſon for exhibiting what may be termed a wreck of nature; eſpecially in a piece of ſcenery, in which, by her particular oeconomy, ſhe is known to repair in the ſubſequent year, what ſhe had loſt by decay in the preceding. A fine face gains nothing from a patch. In our climate, Nature is in an undreſs a much greater part of the year than we would wiſh; and, during the ſhorter period of her ſplendour, a remembrancer of her weeds is unneceſſary.

Gardens of this kind are well ſuited to warm climates. But, in the higher latitudes, that

that is, about fifty degrees and upwards, it frequently happens that ſeven, eight, or even nine months of the year, are too cold for many plants which grow ſpontaneouſly in theſe climates. Though, therefore, one may be poſſeſſed of fortune ſufficient for gardens of the open and more extenſive kinds, as that deſcribed above, it would ſtill be proper to have one of leſs extent, with high walls, and theſe walls ſheltered by thickets of trees, at a proper diſtance, and ſo diſpoſed as to admit the ſun, while they ward off the cold winds. Such ought likewiſe to be the conſtruction of winter gardens, which have been cultivated by ſome people of taſte with much care; and which are warmly recommended by a learned author of your particular acquaintance, who hath diſtinguiſhed himſelf by many ingenious publications.

I know you are not unacquainted with antiquity. It is to be regretted that we know ſo little of the gardens of the antients. We are uncertain of many plants mentioned

ed by their authors, and any accounts we have of their gardening are very imperfect. We are indebted to the fecundity of Milton's genius, not to hiſtorical authority, for his deſcription of Paradiſe; But, though this be wholly the offspring of the poet's imagination, there is reaſon to believe that the gardens of the weſtern Aſiatics were ample, richly furniſhed, and not much different from the poetical deſcription of Eden. Many of the cuſtoms of thoſe nations ſeem to have migrated eaſtwards; and the Chineſe, at this day, have gardens of great extent, and dreſſed in the moſt refined taſte. As the weſtern countries of Aſia have degenerated into barrenneſs ſince they have been in the poſſeſſion of the Turks, ſo have their gardens into fields about their ſeraglios, little cultivated, and ſurrounded with high walls. We meet with paſſages in the antient hiſtories both of Aſia and Europe, from which we may infer, that gardens were formerly objects no leſs of pleaſure than of utility in thoſe countries. The poetical compoſition,

known

known by the title of the *Song of Solomon*, contains paſſages which mark the richneſs and luxuriancy of their gardens. The fruits, the balſams, the perfumes, with their reſpective plants, are introduced in that paſtoral with all the warmth and glow of Oriental pencilling.—A garden incloſed is my ſiſter, my ſpouſe; a ſpring ſhut up, a fountain ſealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomgranates, with pleaſant fruits; camphire with ſpikenard, ſpikenard and ſaffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincenſe; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief ſpices, a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and ſtreams from Lebanon. This king ſeems to have had gardens for plants of different kinds; perhaps according to the ſoil and expoſure.—"I went "down into the garden of nuts to ſee the "fruits of the valley, and to ſee whether "the vine flouriſhed, and the pomgranates "budded."—Solomon, we are told, was one of the wiſeſt and moſt magnificent monarchs of the Eaſt. He was probably no

leſs

leſs diſtinguiſhed for his knowledge and refined taſte. As plants made one great object of his ſtudies, he would hardly fail, with all the advantages of a fine climate, to cultivate thoſe to the greateſt perfection.

The gardens of Alcinous, ſo much celebrated by Homer, correſponded, it is likely, at leaſt, in ſome degree, to the poet's deſcription: For the fables of the antients, you will obſerve, were either allegories of Nature, or founded on hiſtorical truth. The ſtory of Proſerpine, the daughter of Ceres, paſſing her time alternately above and below ground, is a proof of the former, and the fables of Ovid in the latter; they being not only drawn from hiſtory, but arranged in chronological order *.

It

* If we be ſure of the extent of Alcinous's garden, as deſcribed in the Odyſſey, it would make but a moderate garden in modern times; and, it is probable, that improvements

It may be further obſerved, that ſome of the antients noted for fine taſte, though otherwiſe addicted to voluptuouſneſs and ſenſuality, reaped great pleaſure from gardening; which, of all kinds, is the moſt natural, innocent, and ſalutary. The followers of Epicurus were examples of this obſervation among the Greeks; Lucullus, Salluſt the hiſtorian, and many others among the Romans. But, having paſſed the limits which I propoſed at ſetting out, I refer you to Sir William Temple's account of the progreſs

improvements in gardening had made but ſlow progreſs in Greece ſo early as the Trojan war. But there is reaſon to believe, that both architecture and gardening were brought to a conſiderable pitch of refinement, before that period, in Aſia. The pleaſure grounds, or paradiſe of Aſtyages, are mentioned by Xenophon as of great extent: And there is good reaſon to believe, that thoſe of Solomon were likewiſe very extenſive, having watch-towers on the wall at proper diſtances, as ſome of the commentators have obſerved. The gardens of Babylon were curious; not for their extent, but for their elevation in the air, commanding an extenſive view beyond that great city.

greſs of gardening, in his tract, entitled, The Gardens of Epicurus.

LETTER VII.

To Hortensia.

IN inquiries of all kinds it is of importance to ſimplify and generalize. With reſpect to the manners and cuſtoms of mankind, when any action is to be performed, any end to be purſued, or purpoſe effected, the ſhorteſt, plaineſt, and eaſieſt, in a word, the moſt natural method, ought to be ſtudied. Embarraſſment and uncertainty indicate a defect either of ſkill or of taſte. There is hardly a motion of the body, of the head, of an arm, or of an hand, but may be performed with a better or worſe taſte.

taſte. We have examples of this ſo conſtantly before our eyes, that there are few, if any, even though ignorant of what is meant by taſte, who are not, in ſome degree, judges of it.

Before I proceed further, I muſt acquaint you, that, in theſe letters, I diſcharge a duty ſimilar to that of a painter, who teaches his ſcholars by giving them detached and faint outlines, that, by connecting theſe, and carrying on the piece, they may acquire the art of deſign and expreſſion. If, from theſe looſe ſketches, you be led to make more accurate inveſtigations, to ſtate doubts, or to attempt illuſtrations, where circumſtances may appear obſcure, you will thus profit more than if I had undertaken an explicit, methodical, and ſcientific diſcuſſion of the different ſubjects, could I ſuppoſe myſelf equal to ſuch a taſk. I further preſume to claim the privilege of epiſtolary compoſition; which, from its nature, diſ-

penſeth with cloſe connection, laboured periods, or high poliſhing.

External manners, or ſuch as relate to ſocial intercourſe, are either natural or acquired. Among the latter we may rank natural manners improved and poliſhed. Others are adopted, in which nature hath no ſhare, as the bow and the courteſy. Acquired, or artificial manners, are attended with the inconvenience of being a maſk to Nature. Of two perſons, let one be of mild, benevolent, and friendly diſpoſitions, and of manners purely natural; let the other, having artificial manners, be iraſcible, and, in other reſpects, of diſpoſitions oppoſite to thoſe of the former. This perſon, however untoward in his mind, being but moderately known, may, by the dint of manners alone, ſupport a character equal to that of the former; which he cannot be ſuppoſed to have done, had his manners been wholly natural; nor are ſuch examples extraordinary.

Beſides

Beſides this twofold diviſion, manners have been variouſly characterized, as the ſimple, the plain, the ſmooth, the agreeable, the elegant; and in oppoſition to theſe, the pert, the aukward, the forward, the light, the impertinent, with many others, equally applicable to natural and acquired manners. Prudery and coquetry are likewiſe well known to denote a ſpecific diviſion of manners; but it is not my intention to enlarge on a ſubject which hath been ſo amply treated by others.

You will now, I preſume, be diſpoſed to inquire what ſort of manners a perſon of taſte ought chiefly to ſtudy? To this I anſwer, that one of taſte, as well as of prudence, will be diſpoſed to adopt thoſe manners which are beſt ſuited to pleaſe others, and to conciliate their favour and good opinion. This rule is not ſo general as not to admit of exceptions, particularly where ſocial relations, and oeconomical ſubordination, may render a greater or leſs ſeverity of manners neceſſary.

Aukwardneſs

Aukwardneſs and ruſticity, when attended with genius and benevolence, find quarter with thoſe of the ſame, or ſimilar diſpoſitions, though of refined manners, and of a delicate taſte. Others, devoted to external appearances, conſtitute national manners, and ſometimes frivolous faſhions, the touchſtone of internal merit. Some, by addreſs and artificial manners alone, have raiſed themſelves to fortune, while others, labouring under a natural modeſty and reſerve, fail in their efforts, whatever degree of genius or merit they may poſſeſs.

Manners which conſiſt ſolely in the geſtures, attitudes, and movements of the body, are leſs intereſting than thoſe which relate to the conduct of our affairs in ſocial life, and our general intercourſe with the world. Characters frequently depend more on this, than on any other circumſtance. Some may perhaps think taſte and propriety in our conduct reſolvable into prudence; but there is a certain manner

or addreſs which conſtitutes taſte in our deportment, diſtinct from prudence. When we are maſters of this addreſs, it is doubtleſs prudent to avail ourſelves of it. But we ſee many people, whoſe conduct in life is remarkably prudent, who are, nevertheleſs, whether from a natural auſterity, reſerve, or falſe modeſty, unqualified for diſcovering taſte in their common behaviour; while others, by an agreeable addreſs, attract a general approbation, though they be otherwiſe noted for imprudencies. It would be endleſs to produce examples to prove the truth of theſe remarks. It may ſuffice to obſerve, that the rank of people with whom we may have intercourſe, the degree of our acquaintance with them, the nature of our buſineſs, and many other circumſtances, render correſponding differences in our behaviour neceſſary to ſupport propriety and taſte. We are frequently involved in companies where a grave and reſerved deportment is proper; at other times, gaiety, wit, and humour, become ſeaſonable. They

who

who devote themſelves to ſtudy, or lead a recluſe life, are commonly leſs qualified to judge what ought to be the preciſe degree of either of theſe, than others who are much in the world; nor is a ſuperior ſtrength of judgment always a ſufficient balance on the bad effects of too much retirement, frequent intercourſe with the public being the proper corrector of this evil. It is further remarkable, that one who hath ſpent the period of youth, or the greater part of it, in monkiſh retirement, will hardly afterwards acquire that urbanity and freedom of manners which is to be gained from an early commerce with proper company.

The obſervation, that, in rural ſcenery, art ought to be loſt in nature, is applicable to artificial manners, which ought to be performed with ſo much eaſe, as to appear the offspring of Nature. Refined taſte can ill tolerate an oſtentatious exhibition of artificial manners, and is better pleaſed with the ſimplicity of Nature, eſpecially when

we

we diſcover the mind to be conſtitutionally humane, and of a benevolent diſpoſition, which alone often apologiſes for ruſticity. Were a perſon of taſte to meet a ſhepherdeſs in the wilds of Wales of an elegant form, regular features, and in a clean, however plain dreſs, her native ſimplicity, innocence, modeſty, and complaiſance, would be more attracting, ſhall we ſay affecting and overpowering, than the moſt artificial and courtly manners.

Acquired manners are relative, and, like the faſhion of our dreſs, are valued as they obtain in the times or countries in which we live. Our manners of complaiſance in Britain are below the ſtandard of the French, their's, again, below that of the Italians. The former of theſe two, we in Britain conſider as, in part, ſuperfluous, the latter oppreſſive. Thus the French will be led to eſtimate the Italian manners as above the juſt ſtandard, and our's as below it; and they may probably entertain the

ſame

ſame opinion, when, perhaps a century hence, they ſhall have reached the preſent Italian pitch, and we their's; ſo difficult is it to fix our feet, when we once abandon the paths of Nature.

LETTER VIII.

To Lælius.

IN an eſſay on taſte, wit and humour naturally preſent themſelves. Wit is the offspring of that faculty of the mind, which readily diſcovers the relations and reſemblances of things; and by collating theſe, and framing, from their aſſemblages, alluſions, metaphors, and figures, thus ſuggeſt new and pleaſant ideas to the imagination. This is nearly the definition of wit given by Mr Locke, who likewiſe obſerves, that the operations of the mind, with reſpect to wit and judgment, are oppoſite; ſince,

in

in the former, it aſſembles its ideas of things, that, by ſeeing their congruity, new pictures may be ſtarted to the fancy; whereas, in judging, it diſcriminates or weighs them accurately, to diſcover their differences. The beſt kind of wit is that which, beſides pleaſing a reader or hearer, by preſenting new and ſtriking images, tends to elucidate the thoughts of the author or ſpeaker.

It is with wit as with the moſt delicious meats, which, by corruption, become the moſt deteſtible. A mind poſſeſſed of a refined taſte will reliſh true wit; but falſe wit will be, to ſuch a mind, irkſome and diſguſting. Of this kind are the pun, the quibble, the quaintneſs of the pointed and frequently affected antitheſis, and ſuch low conceits. When a fillip to converſation, however, is wanted, or when ſome proper end can be anſwered, ſomething ſimilar to this ſort of wit may, at times, be introduced. A company, engaged in agreeable

converſation, was interrupted by one who aſked abruptly, whether there ever had been a ſtronger man in the world than Hercules? You yourſelf, replied another, for you have brought in Hercules head and ſhoulders. This anſwer was a proper rebuke to the queriſt, while it gave the company an opportunity of reſuming the converſation. The wit here lies in the Engliſh phraſe, *to bring in head and ſhoulders*, which alludes to bodily ſtrength.

We ſometimes meet with low wit in the moſt refined compoſitions of the antients. Cicero himſelf hath given way to this weakneſs, though ſeldom; and never where dignity and gravity are neceſſary. Many of Martial's epigrams are mere quibbles, and ſuch as any one, poſſeſſed of a moderate ſenſe of propriety, would avoid uttering in company. It is to be regretted that Ovid was ſo much addicted to a ſporting with words. His compoſitions abound with verſes which every reader of taſte would

would wiſh had been expunged. Daniel Heinſius, one of the beſt and moſt temperate critics, hath declared the greater part of theſe verſes never to have come from Ovid. Where Horace, in his Art of Poetry, introduces Empedocles about to throw himſelf into mount Ætna, he hath been charged with a witticiſm of the loweſt kind: And it were to be wiſhed the paſſage had leſs the appearance of it. *Ardentem frigidus Ætnam inſiluit. Frigidus* is here ſaid, by ſome of the commentators, to be wittily oppoſed to *ardens*. This ſeems unworthy of Horace. We have reaſon, therefore, to believe that the poet meant no more by the word *frigidus*, than that Empedocles proceeded coolly and deliberately in his deſperate meaſure.

Humour, when applied to the mind, is a word peculiar to the Engliſh language, and is ſo nearly connected with wit, that they can ſcarcely admit of definitions wholly diſtinct. Whatever is conveyed to the mind with

with pleaſantry, and in a facetious manner, eſpecially if attended with elegance, and excites gay, rather than ſerious ideas, may be termed humour.

The beauties which conſiſt in the idiomatical parts of a language can hardly be transferred into another; for a periphraſis being, for the moſt part, neceſſary, we are in danger of conveying ideas not preciſely the ſame with thoſe implied in the original idiom. Neither the *gaiété de coeur*, *bel éſprit*, nor *enjouement* of the French, correſpond exactly to the Engliſh term *humour*, when applied to the mind; and though the French uſe the term *humeur*, as *belle humeur*, *bonne humeur*, it is, I think, ſtill different from this Engliſh term. The *lepor et feſtivitas orationis* of Cicero is more expreſſive of the Engliſh term humour. The Preſident *de Thou*, or perhaps ſome other author, ſeems to have been of this opinion, when, in order to avoid barbariſms, and in Latinizing his proper names, he turned the *Duc de Joyeuſe* into *Lepidus*.

There

There is perhaps no better criterion of wit and humour than their effects on a mind of a refined taſte, which will be conſcious of their effects producing pleaſure and animation. Ridicule and raillery are cloſely connected with humour; hence the comic drama cannot well be ſupported without it. In this the comedy of the antients differed from that of the moderns. Much good ſenſe, many ſubſtantial moral maxims, and theſe happily expreſſed, diſtinguiſh the comedies of Terence; but they contain little or no humour. Many Engliſh comedies, which would have paſſed well on the antient theatres, have been conſidered by the moderns as lifeleſs, and have been wholly neglected, from a defect of humour.

Mathematical reſearches, metaphyſical diſcuſſions, and abſtract inveſtigations of whatever kind, are wholly oppoſite to wit and humour. But there are few other compoſitions which do not admit humour, either

either occaſionally and delicately introduced, or running through the whole. Humour hath even appeared in ſermons, of which Latimer's are a proof. About a century afterwards, that is, in the time of Charles II. it became faſhionable to introduce humour into ſermons. And Stern, under the fictitious and whimſical name of Yorick, hath thought proper to introduce it a-new in ſermons. This is, however, inconſiſtent with the dignity of the pulpit. The period in which Latimer lived is a ſufficient apology for his humour, which would not paſs in the preſent age, though it was well received two centuries ago. So the wit and humour of Plautus met with much applauſe in that author's time, though it did not ſuit the more refined taſte of the Auguſtan age, as we learn from Horace, whoſe authority, in a caſe of this kind, is to be held preferable to that of Cicero and Macrobius.

And yet our ſires with joy could Plautus hear,
Gay were his jeſts, his numbers charm'd their ear.
Let me not ſay too laviſhly they prais'd,
But ſure their judgment was full cheaply pleas'd *.
FRANCIS.

Some have expreſſed their ſurpriſe that Cicero and Horace, being both avowedly poſſeſſed of a penetrating judgment, and of a refined taſte, ſhould differ ſo widely in their ſentiments, that the one ſhould applaud, and the other condemn, the ſame author. But it is an eaſy matter to account for this difference. Cicero, when a youth, had been entertained with the plays of Plautus, and had then joined in the general applauſe of that author; and we ſeldom fail to retain, till the latter period of life, a liking to what had pleaſed us when young. Beſides, from the time of Cicero's youth, till that in which Horace may be ſuppoſed able

* At noſtri proavi Plautinos et numeros et
Laudavere ſales; nimium patienter utroſque,
Ne dicam ſtulte, mirati.

able to judge of the merit of authors, refinement in language and in compoſition had made great advances in Rome; ſo that Horace, we may believe, could but ill tolerate what pleaſed Cicero when a youth. This philoſopher was forty-two years of age when Horace was born; and Horace twenty-two years of age when Cicero was put to death.

Even ſatire may be conducted with humour; but a ſatiriſt poſſeſſed of a taſte ſufficiently delicate and refined for this kind of compoſition, is hardly to be found. We cannot judge better of the difference between the humorous ſatire and the acrimonious, and of the ſuperiority of the former, than by comparing the ſatires of Horace with thoſe of Juvenal. Nor is there any character more expreſſive of Horace as an author of humour, than that contained in the three well known verſes of Perſius.

Unlike in method with conceal'd deſign,
Did crafty Horace his low numbers join:
And with a ſly inſinuating grace,
Laugh'd at his friend, and look'd him in the face;
Would raiſe a bluſh, where ſecret vice he found,
And tickle while he gently prob'd the wound.
With ſeeming innocence the croud beguil'd;
But made the deſperate paſſes when he ſmil'd *;

DRYDEN.

It may be obſerved here, that, as the more refined humour is loſt on minds of little or no taſte; ſo what is deemed humour by theſe, is frequently irkſome to minds of greater refinement. The ill timed acclamations, not uncommon at our theatrical ſhews, make one proof of the truth of this obſervation. But this impropriety is not peculiar to the Britiſh theatres. It will be found to prevail, in all ages, and in every city, become rich, populous, and licentious, where the greater part of thoſe who frequent the theatres are deficient both in taſte

* Omne vafer vitium, ridenti Flaccus amico
Tangit, et admiſſus circum praecordia ludit,
Callidus excuſſo populum ſuſpendere naſo.

and in education. Horace, in his art of poetry, complains, that the Atellanae and ſatiric pieces, which were ſimilar to our farces, met with more applauſe than they merited; and his contemporary Phaedrus, in his fable of the buffoon and the pig, ſatirizes the falſe taſte even of the Auguſtan age. We frequently meet with complaints of the like nature among the French authors; particularly at a period when a refined taſte for theatrical repreſentations ought to have prevailed more generally; that is, in the days of Peter Corneille, Moliere, and Racine. Yea, what is very remarkable, Moliere was unable to force upon the public the beſt comedy he ever wrote, that is, the Miſanthrope, without the aſſiſtance of a farce, the merit of which, when compared with that of the other, is inſignificant *.

But,

* Moliere ne laiſſoit point languir le public ſans nouveauté; toûjour heureux dans le choix de ſes caractéres, il

But, notwithſtanding all that hath been ſaid and written relating to wit, humour, and ridicule, ſuch is their nature, that we often find them ſo interwoven in the ſame paſſage, as to be inſeparable; and any one of the three may be ſuppoſed, at times, to include the other two. To bring this to trial,

il avoit travaillé ſur celui du *Miſanthrope;* il le donna au public: Mais il ſentit de la premiére repréſentation que le peuple de Paris vouloit plutot rire qu' admirer; et que pour vingt perſonnes qui ſont ſuſceptibles de ſentir des traits delicats et elevez, il y en a cent qui les rebutent faute de les connoître.——

——Et le *Miſanthrope* et le *Medecin* malgré lui joint enſemble ramenerent tout le pêlemêle de Paris, auſſi bien que les connoiſſeurs. Moliére s' applaudiſſant du ſuccês de ſon invention, pour forcer le public à lui rendre juſtice, hazarda d'en tirer une glorieux vengeance, en faiſant jouir le *Miſanthrope* ſeul. Il eut un ſuccés tres-favorable: De ſorte qui l'on ne peut lui reprocher que la petite piéce eut fait aller la grande. VIE DE MOLIERE.

——Laiſſons là les applaudiſſemens du parterre. Il en donne ſouvent aux acteurs fort mal a propos. Il applaudit même plus rarement au vrai mérite qu' au faux, LE SAGE.

trial, let one, in reading Butler's Hudibras, a volume which, from beginning to end, abounds with all the three, endeavour, in the courſe of reading, to mark the limits between the wit, humour, and ridicule, in this compoſition. The ſame obſervation may be applied to Rabelais.

LETTER IX.

To Lælius.

THE third great field, in which taſte may be ſaid to exerciſe itſelf, is the arts and ſciences. To conſider theſe minutely, as objects of taſte, would occupy many volumes. The three ſiſter arts, poetry, painting, and muſic, which ſeem to claim the firſt place, ought perhaps, more than any of the reſt, to originate from a particular temperament or condition of the mind. This ſtate or diſpoſition manifeſts itſelf

itſelf by the pleaſure which they excite in the mind long before it knows them ſcientifically; and it hath rarely, if ever happened, that one hath made great progreſs in theſe arts, who did not diſcover an early attachment to, and delight in them.

Taſte and genius have been brought to a ſeverer proof by poetry, than by any of the other arts. The more important branches of poetry, and ſuch as require the greateſt efforts of the mind, are here meant. The moderns have, in general, adopted the moſt diſtinguiſhed Greek and Roman poets as patterns. Some authors, however, of later times, more envious than emulous of the fame of the antients, would reprobate them as ſtandards. The laws of poetry laid down by Ariſtotle, Horace, and Longinus, though ſubjects of endleſs criticiſm, can hardly be ſaid to be improved by the moderns.

The Greek poets, and the greater part of the Roman, were particularly attentive and delicate

delicate in accommodating their rhythm or poetical meaſures to the ſubjects of their compoſitions: And of the great branches of poetry, each is diſtinguiſhed by a metrical ſtructure peculiar to itſelf. Hence, Horace divides poetry into four kinds, the epic, elegiac, dramatical and lyric. This poet, in his epiſtle to the Piſos, intending chiefly the reformation of the Roman ſtage, means here, that authors of dramatical compoſitions ought to be well acquainted with all theſe kinds; a branch of ſcience not to be acquired without much labour and cloſe attention, the ſtructure of their verſes being various, and their proſodaical laws rigid and indiſpenſible.

In order to acquire a taſte in epic poetry, or to improve and correct our taſte when it is acquired, it may be queſtioned whether it would be more eligible firſt to ſtudy Ariſtotle's art of poetry, with its various commentaries, or to read the Iliad of Homer with attention. It was from this great original,

original, we are told, the philoſopher framed his laws of the Epopoeia. It is not to be doubted, that, from a careful peruſal of the Iliad, we may learn the great lines which conſtitute and mark the excellencies of epic compoſition; and, though this diſtinguiſhed work is to be regarded as the beſt exemplar, there are, nevertheleſs, in it ſome circumſtances, which, being conſidered as beacons, ought to be avoided.

The Iliad teaches us, that an epic poem conſiſts of two great branches, the fable, or ground-work, and the machinery. Some would include both theſe under the term *fable*. The action muſt be one, having its cauſe, its plot, and its developement. The cauſe of Achilles's reſentment was the rape of Briſeis by Agamemnon. The incidents, in conſequence of this reſentment, ſo diſaſtrous, and almoſt fatal to the Greeks, make the plot or body of the poem. The death of Patroclus, the loſs of Achilles's armour, the return of that hero to the Grecian

cian camp, and the death of Hector, make the unravelling. The incidents muſt be naturally connected, much diverſified, and deeply intereſting. Beſides theſe, epiſodes, as a relief and ſupport to the reader's mind, are to be ſo artfully introduced, that both they and the incidents may raiſe the reader's expectation, may coincide with, and promote the general action, and lead on to the great event. Helen's deſcription of the Grecian heroes to Priam, and the ſhield of Achilles, are beautiful epiſodes; the latter of theſe is a ſingular proof of the inexhauſtible fecundity of poetical imagination in the great author.

We learn further from the Iliad, that an epic poem ought to contain a variety of characters, and that theſe ought to be properly ſupported throughout. In this circumſtance, Homer hath not been equalled by any poet whatever, the characters of his different heroes being ſo diverſified, and each ſo particularly marked, that this

branch

branch of his poetical art cannot fail to ſtrike the moſt ſuperficial reader. Characters thus artfully drawn, diſtinctly marked, and properly ſupported, become equally intereſting to the reader, and ſubſervient to the author's purpoſes. For, as a ſkilful architect, availing himſelf of his materials already prepared, judiciouſly arranges theſe in rearing a compact and elegant edifice; ſo the epic poet, purſuing a ſimilar oeconomy, ſuits his various characters to correſponding incidents, in which Homer hath been ſingularly happy, eſpecially in his cataſtrophe. Had Achilles yielded to the ſolicitations of the three chiefs, ſent to importune his return to the Grecian army, he would have acted contrary to that obſtinacy and implacability which mark his character. But, when his friend is killed, his favourite armour loſt, and in poſſeſſion of Hector, pride, revenge, and the impetuoſity of his mind, co-operate to render his return natural; and the unravelling is thus brought on with the greateſt propriety.

The whole fable ought to be conducted with probability; but, as an epic poet is ſuppoſed to excite ſurpriſe and admiration in his readers, and, in general, to keep their different paſſions in play, he is allowed to go to the utmoſt limits of probability, provided he do not tranſgreſs them. This, however, is one of the laws which Homer hath been charged with violating, particularly in giving ſpeech to the horſes of Achilles. The poet hath likewiſe been cenſured for ſuppoſing Priam unacquainted with the heroes of Greece till the tenth year of the ſiege, and, conſequently, would make his interview with Helen on the walls of the city improbable. But we are relieved of this difficulty, by believing what is not without its evidence, that the Greeks ſpent only the laſt of the ten years of that war in the ſiege of the capital.

Homer hath, in ſome circumſtances, been charged with meanneſs; as in deſcribing his heroes occupied in the offices of the kitchen.

kitchen. But deſcriptions of this kind will not offend thoſe who attend to the manners and ſimplicity of ages ſo remote. It may be obſerved, too, that Homer's account of theſe offices is ſupported with language which can hardly be ſaid to ſink from the dignity of the epic; and, upon the whole, we have no example of any poet having reached that majeſtic ſimplicity which is ſo conſpicuous in every part of the Iliad.

With reſpect to the ſublime, Homer hath been conſtituted a ſtandard by the moſt approved judges. Whether he hath always made a proper application of his machinery, hath been doubted. But the mythology of the antients is known to be, in many parts, obſcure to us; nor can we, at ſo great a diſtance of time, pretend to judge with accuracy, or to draw unexceptionable concluſions relating to that branch. Beſides, the heathen deities being conſidered by the antients as hiſtorical perſonages, it was not then in the power of a poet to change either

ther their reſpective functions, or the ſide which they were ſuppoſed to have taken from the beginning of a war, without a violation of propriety. But, where alluſions or allegorical perſonages were wholly the offspring of this poet's imagination, they have ſeldom, if ever, been found abſurd or improper.

LETTER X.

To Lælius.

So much hath been ſaid on the ſublime ſince the days of Ariſtotle, or rather of Longinus, that there is little room left to make new obſervations on that ſubject; and, though my ſentiments on it do not coincide in every circumſtance with thoſe of ſome diſtinguiſhed authors, I do not deſire you to give any preference to mine, further than

than their plauſibility ſhall be found to recommend them.

We cannot, perhaps, examine the ſublime better than by attending to its effects on the mind. Theſe may be reduced to the following ſenſations: Complacency, pleaſure, admiration; ſurpriſe, wonder, aſtoniſhment; fear, awe, horror. Reverence and veneration are frequently concomitants of one or other of the preceding feelings.

Some would disjoin the beautiful from the ſublime, conſidering them as wholly diſtinct. But, notwithſtanding the authority of a very ingenious author *, this obſervation ſeems to be but ill grounded. The ſublime admits of a twofold diviſion; that which is attended with the beautiful, and that which affects the mind with the more gloomy ſenſations. In a ſerene ſtate of the air, the blue aether, the celeſtial bodies, the boundleſs ocean, are objects both beautiful and

* A Philoſophical Inquiry, &c.

and ſublime. Let the air be overcaſt with black clouds, and followed with tremendous claps of thunder, and flaſhes of lightening; let the ocean be thrown into a tumultuous ſtate, its vaſt and noiſy billows breaking againſt hideous rocks: This, and the like convulſions of nature, make examples of the awful and gloomy ſublime. The riſing ſun is an object both beautiful and ſublime. Ovid's deſcription of the palace of the ſun, and Virgil's of Cyrene's watery manſions, are ſublime and beautiful. But the ſtorm of Ceyx, by the former, and that of Æneas, by the latter, are examples of the oppoſite kind of the ſublime.

Shakeſpeare, in ſome of his capital tragedies, hath availed himſelf of the awful ſublime; which, in the theatrical exhibition, hath proved of conſiderable uſe; for, though his moral maxims, and bold delineations of Nature, might ſtill have had their due influence on the more thinking part of

an audience, or with thoſe of a more refined taſte, independent of theſe ſhews, the greater part will always be found to yield their minds to the awful gloom of this kind of machinery.

It hath been obſerved, that the ſublime ought always to be attended with a degree of obſcurity, and that we ought not to ſee the limits of the objects deſcribed. This obſervation will be found to hold in that kind of the ſublime which affects the mind with aſtoniſhment, terror, or the like paſſions. But, when the beautiful is joined with the ſublime, this obſcurity is not equally neceſſary. The caſe ſeems to be, that, in the former, the imagination being ſtruck with ſomething awful, the utmoſt boundaries of which remain unknown, naturally figures to itſelf objects more tremendous than if the deſcription had been more definite.

To aſcertain the nature and different kinds of the ſublime, a variety of paſſages hath

hath been brought from the more diſtinguiſhed poets, and likewiſe from the ſacred records *. Among theſe, a paſſage in the book of Job hath been often remarked; and the ingenious author †, mentioned above, obſerves juſtly, that the influence of that paſſage upon the mind ariſes chiefly from its obſcurity. I was told by a friend, that, from his being a boy at ſchool, he had never read that paſſage without a thrilling ſenſation, which ſeemed to paſs through his body. This he aſcribed to a natural timidity; but was afterwards not a little pleaſed to find it repeatedly quoted by authors of taſte, as a ſtriking example of the ſublime. "In thoughts from the viſions "of the night, when deep ſleep falleth up- "on men, fear came upon me, and trem- "bling, which made all my bones to ſhake. "Then a ſpirit paſſed before my face, "The hair of my fleſh ſtood up. It ſtood "ſtill, *but I could not diſcern the form there-*

"*of*;

* See Mr Smith's Commentary on Longinus.

† A Philoſophical Inquiry, &c.

" *of;* an image was before mine eyes;
" there was ſilence; and I heard a voice,
" Shall mortal man be more juſt than
" God?"

The ſtyle of the antient oriental compoſition is ſo different from that of the modern, that an author at preſent cannot expect ſucceſs from any imitation of it. We learn, nevertheleſs, from many parts of theſe antient records, that groups of ideas, diſtinctly arranged, and forcibly conveyed to the mind in few but appoſite words, give nerves and ſtrength to compoſition. The account of Joſeph, particularly where he makes himſelf known to his brethren, is rendered affecting, chiefly by the natural ſimplicity of the language, and unaffected manner of the hiſtorian. " In the ſimple
" narration of the ſacred hiſtorian," ſays a learned and ingenious divine, " it is ſet be-
" fore us with greater energy and higher
" effect, than if it had been wrought up

" with all the colouring of the moſt admi-
" red modern eloquence *."

It hath been univerſally allowed that theſe writings abound with ſublime paſſages. But it hath not been ſo generally remarked, that the peculiar excellency of theſe paſſages conſiſts chiefly in a bold and majeſtic ſimplicity. Hence the beſt paraphraſes and verſifications have conſtantly been found inferior to the original, or to literal tranſlations from it. Even the ſolicitous agitations of the mind may be more happily expreſſed in a few words than in extended periods. Were lamentations for female barrenneſs, or prayers to remove this evil, to be compoſed at large, and in the moſt artificial language, theſe could not be more expreſſive of the ſtate of the mind, than the requeſt of Rachel to her huſband, " Give
" me children, or I die;" and ſo of many other paſſages. In general, a bold and ſhort adumbration

* Sermon on the character of Joſeph by Dr Blair.

adumbration is better ſuited to the ſublime, than minute and laboured deſcriptions, eſpecially that of the awful kind.

It is owing to this obſcurity in the ſublime, that poets have availed themſelves ſo much of madneſs. In this ſtate of the mind, wild and unconnected expreſſions are thrown out, which attract the attention, and ſtrike the imagination more forcibly than a regular chain of argumentation. Hamlet and Lear abound with excellent examples of this kind. But, to ordinary poets, this would prove a pathleſs foreſt, in which they would be apt to loſe themſelves. The antients, and particularly the Greeks, were not ignorant of the advantages to be drawn from this frantic ſtate of the mind. Hence Pentheus, Oreſtes, and Œdipus were found rich ſubjects for the Greeks, and afterwards for the Roman tragedians.

It is for the ſame reaſon that dreams have been found ſubſervient to the purpo-

ſes

ſes of the poets: The laborious agitations of the mind, and the extravagancy of its fancies in this ſtate, not unlike that of madneſs, ſuiting their ends better than when it purſues a regular and connected chain of ideas. Shakeſpeare could not have expreſſed the compunction of Lady Macbeath's mind better than by a dream, in which ſhe finds it impoſſible to waſh the blood off her hands; nor could the horrors of Richard's mind have been marked in a more ſtriking manner than by his dream. Virgil hath, with no leſs ſucceſs, deſcribed the extreme anguiſh of Dido's mind by a dream, in which ſhe ſees her hero with an unfriendly and fierce aſpect; is then left ſolitary and forlorn; is next involved in a long and tireſome journey, and ſeeks the Trojans in a remote and deſert country. There is not in all the Æneid a more exquiſite piece of poetical compoſition than the dream of Æneas when Troy was in flames. But there are few, if any, whoſe minds have reached maturity, who do not know, from their own

experience,

experience, to what degree of ſolicitude the mind may be reduced in ſleep, and how far an artful poet may avail himſelf of the wild and fantaſtic ſcenery which is preſented in that ſtate.

LETTER XI.

To Lælius.

BESIDE the entertaining accounts of the varied ſcenery with which you have been ſurrounded ſince you left us, I long to hear your obſervations on the manners of the people among whom you live. I doubt not you will have, by this time, had opportunities of remarking, that the ſame manners, cuſtoms, and actions of mankind, are differently eſtimated in different countries. You are not unacquainted with the information of travellers who tell us, that

that ſome cuſtoms which are held virtuous in one part of the world, are ſtigmatized with the denomination of vice in another; and that ſome ſceptical philoſophers have availed themſelves of this circumſtance in ſupport of the doctrine, that there is no eſſential difference between virtue and vice; but that the value of human actions, with reſpect to good and evil, depends wholly on opinion, or on human inſtitutions.

The well known objection to this opinion, however trite, hath its weight. The faculties of the human mind are no more ſufficient to diſcover the limits which divide ſome moral truths, than we are able, by our bodily ſenſes, to mark the limits which lie between many of their reſpective objects. It would be as abſurd to conclude that there is no difference between virtue and vice, becauſe their limits ſometimes elude the powers of our minds, as to aſſert, that there is no difference between heat and cold, becauſe tepid water yields a ſenſation

of

of warmth to a cold hand, and of cold to an hand warmer than the water; or to affirm that all colours are the ſame, becauſe two oppoſite colours may be ſo artfully ſhaded into one another, as to render the limits between them undiſcoverable by the moſt piercing eye. But, not to moraliſe further, I am here inſenſibly led to purſue the ſubject of my laſt letter: And, *firſt*, with reſpect to the moral of epic poems.

It is remarkable, that none of the great epic poems have been allowed by the critics to be complete in point of moral, though no part of theſe compoſitions be more important than this. If any epic poem be poſſeſſed of an unexceptionable moral, I ſhould think Telemachus may lay claim to it, preferably to the reſt. It ſeems to have eſcaped thoſe who have criticiſed Milton in this reſpect, that the poet was to conſider himſelf as ſo far tied down to hiſtorical facts and theological truths, that a moderate deviation from either would have

expoſed

expoſed him to cenſure. If, therefore, he conducted himſelf ſo as not to give offence, he was no further anſwerable. Beſides, it may be obſerved, that the general moral of Paradiſe Loſt is a good one, ſince the violation of a divine law may be ſuppoſed to meet with a correſponding puniſhment, whether that law and puniſhment be out of the common courſe of nature or in it.

The moral of the Iliad hath not eſcaped cenſure. But the critics ſeem not to have made ſufficient allowance for two circumſtances which go far to apologiſe for the poet. The theology of the antients, as is well known, did not lead to pure morality. The Greek and Roman philoſophers, without regard to their deities, have left us, if not complete ſyſtems, a variety of ſound moral maxims. A poet, however, of thoſe times, when he called in the deities to his aſſiſtance, which in the epic was indiſpenſible, being obliged to conſider them as real perſonages, could not avail himſelf of their offices

offices in a ſenſe always ſtrictly mythological. When Achilles, overcome by the paſſion of revenge, is about to draw his ſword againſt Agamemnon, Minerva, inviſible to every body but to Achilles, diſſuades him from an action ſo raſh. The Goddeſs of Wiſdom is here properly employed. But, had Hector given an advice, however ſalutary, to the Trojan nation, this Goddeſs being already enliſted on the ſide of the Greeks, could have had no ſhare in it, without violating the laws of the Epopoeia.

We read an epic poem with more ſatisfaction when it is founded in truth, than when we know it to be a mere novel. We have no reaſon to doubt of the Trojan war, and that the Princes of Greece and of Troy, as characteriſed by Homer, were actors there; and ſo of the other great lines of that poem. The poet, therefore, being reſtricted to hiſtorical facts generally known in his own time, could not properly depart

ſo far from theſe, as to conduct his moral wholly to his own mind. The ſavage treatment of Hector's body by Achilles, tends to prove the truth of this obſervation, ſince the poet can hardly be ſuppoſed to have ſpontaneouſly fabricated a piece of ſcenery, which exhibits his favourite hero in a point of view ſhocking to humanity, and committing a barbarity which Homer himſelf condemns and regrets. Nor is it probable, that, had the Iliad been wholly the offspring of Homer's imagination, he would have choſen two heroes of the ſame name, ſince this is attended with a conſiderable inconvenience in poetical compoſitions, the author being brought under the neceſſity of having recourſe to patronymic diſtinctions, or particular epithets, when he mentions them, as in the caſe of the Telamonian and Oilean Ajax. But Homer's morality will meet with the indulgence of thoſe who attend to the moral conduct of antient nations, when in a ſtate of war with one another, which, when compared with the

rights of war and peace obſerved by the European nations in our times, we would conſider not only as immoral, but for the moſt part inhuman, and ſometimes iniquitous.

Two queſtions have been ſtated relating to machinery: The one is, Whether an epic poem would be better without machinery altogether? The other, Whether machinery, according to the theology of the antients, be preferable to that of the moderns? With reſpect to the former, it may be obſerved, that young minds, eſpecially if they be of a poetical temperament, will always be pleaſed with machinery. They who have been uſed to read the Iliad and the Æneid in their early days, would reckon theſe two poems greatly mutilated, were they to be robbed of the flowers of their machinery. But they who have not read epic poetry till later in life, will not find machinery equally entertaining or neceſſary; and, if they be of a turn

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of mind addicted to metaphyſical inveſtigations, or to abſtract reaſoning, they will probably wiſh to diſpenſe with machinery altogether.

With reſpect to the other queſtion, the following obſervations may tend to remove the doubt. In epic and dramatic compoſitions, and even in hiſtory, we feel our minds more or leſs intereſted, as the characters are more or leſs diſtinctly marked. In this circumſtance, no poem hath ever equalled the Iliad. The characters of Agamemnon, Neſtor, Achilles, Ulyſſes, and the other chiefs, are diſtinct and intereſting. The caſe is the ſame with machinery. It is not enough that ſuperior beings, who mix in human affairs, be all good or bad, in an exquiſite degree; ſomething more is requiſite. We are, for the moſt part, early acquainted with the characters of the heathen deities; that of Jupiter, Apollo, Mercury; of Juno, Venus, Pallas, as well as of the reſt, being all diſtinct and familiar

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to us, their introduction in a poem, like that of the heroes, becomes intereſting. Angels and demons are, from their nature, conſidered the one as exquiſitely good, the other conſtantly wicked and miſchievous. It is true, Milton hath endeavoured to diverſify the characters of the devils. But ſtill theſe beings are ſuppoſed to ſet themſelves in oppoſition to every thing good, and to be invariably actuated by a malevolent principle. We find the antient poets bringing their deities together, to concert in council the fate of ſome momentous enterpriſe. This, when conducted with judgment, adds a great dignity and ſolemnity to a poem. But beings, ſo oppoſite in their natures as to be ſuppoſed in a conſtant ſtate of enmity and war, can never conſtitute machinery ſo ductile as to ſerve the purpoſes of an epic poet. The antient deities, too, as is well known, were ſometimes happily introduced in paſtoral; and Ovid hath, by the ſame machinery, wonderfully enriched his fables, a kind of compoſition particularly

ticularly captivating to young minds. After all, it will be readily acknowledged, that modern poets cannot avail themſelves of this machinery with ſo great propriety as the antients, for reaſons ſufficiently obvious, and which have been taken notice of by others.

Theſe few obſervations may perhaps appear to ſome as tending to depreciate Paradiſe Loſt. Nothing is leſs meant. Such is the nature of that poem, that it is difficult to mark the limits between the ground-work and the machinery, or to tell where the one ends, and the other begins. Adam and Eve, being but lately formed, and having hardly felt the paſſions incident to human nature, make a baſis too ſlender for ſo great a ſuperſtructure. The truth is, the angels and demons conſtitute rather the heroes than the machinery of the poem. Hence the difficulty of comparing Paradiſe Loſt with the other great epic poems, in which we find an ample ground-work,

founded

founded in nature, between which and the machinery the limits are obvious; and, when we remove the latter, a ſubſtantial piece of hiſtory remains. But, to whatever objections Milton's plan may lie open, his excellencies in the beautiful and ſublime, and his delightful deſcriptions, will ever be admired by readers of taſte.

LETTER XII.

To Lælius.

THE comparative merit of Homer and of Virgil, hath been a ſubject in which critics have engaged with a degree of warmth correſponding to the differences of their ſentiments. Thoſe, eſpecially of the two laſt centuries, arranging themſelves under the banner of a Scaliger, a Scioppius, or of whatever learned man they found beſt to ſuit their purpoſe, ſeemed to think it neceſſary

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ceſſary to detract from the merit of the one poet, in proportion to their applauſes of the other. In later times, criticiſm hath been conducted with more temper. It is at length found, that the value of the Iliad, and of the Æneid, may, by a comparative inveſtigation, be eſtimated, without detracting from that of either.

Father Rapin hath, among others, written expreſsly on this ſubject, and, though he hath been juſtly charged, particularly by M. Bayle, with ſome inaccuracies, his compariſon of the two celebrated poets contains many judicious and ingenious obſervations. Theſe, with a few exceptions, have met with the approbation of the commentators, whether of his own time or of thoſe who have flouriſhed ſince. An examination of ſome of this author's remarks ſhall make the ſubject of a letter or two. You will readily ſee that it would be contrary to the ſcope of theſe Letters, to purſue the minute and extenſive criticiſms of the

the Daciers, and of many other commentators. That of Father Rapin being general, and not deſcending below the great lines of the two poems, is better ſuited to the few obſervations I mean to offer.

This critic finds the fable of the Æneid ſuperior to that of the Iliad. A chief, he obſerves, giving way to rage, deaf to the dictates of reaſon, and ſo far ſtimulated by a vindictive paſſion, as to deſert his friends, and deny his aſſiſtance to the cauſe which he had undertaken to ſupport, till it was brought to the brink of ruin, is in every reſpect a diſagreeable ſubject. Whereas, Æneas, having witneſſed the deſolation of his country, and of its metropolis, engages in an enterpriſe the moſt laudable, and worthy of an hero; that is, to find a new ſettlement for himſelf, his family, and his fellow citizens. This, concludes the author, is a ſubject wholly ſuited to epic compoſition, and ſuch as a judicious poet would chooſe.

This compariſon of the two fables is, in ſome reſpects, juſt: But there is a circumſtance in each of them which ſeems to have eſcaped the author. The wrath of Achilles, it is true, was the immediate cauſe of the diſaſters which befell the Grecian army, as the poet informs us. There was, however, a cauſe antecedent to this, which may be termed the primary or remote cauſe; that is, the injuſtice done to Achilles. Agamemnon had been inveſted with regal power by the chiefs of the army, who were themſelves independent princes of Greece. This was the greateſt honour that could be conferred on any man. It was, therefore, the indiſpenſible duty of Agamemnon, not only to conduct himſelf with moderation, but to protect and defend every individual of his army, of whatever rank, from the injuries of another; in place of which, he tyrannically invaded the property of a chief, whoſe friendſhip it was his buſineſs ſtudiouſly to preſerve: Thus, the misfortunes which the other chiefs and the army afterwards ſuffered,

ed, may be conſidered, in the natural courſe of things, as a puniſhment for having quietly tolerated ſo flagrant a violation of regal power; for we cannot ſuppoſe theſe chiefs to have delegated to their King a power ſo unlimited as to endanger their reſpective properties.

The argument now before us is particularly intereſting in ſupporting the poet's character. Some of the commentators have confounded Homer's morality with the moral of the Iliad. There are paſſages in that poem which may appear, eſpecially in the preſent times, remote from pure morality. But this is different from what may be termed the moral baſis of the fable; which depends much upon the extent of power which either the chiefs had conferred upon Agamemnon, or which he himſelf believed he ought to poſſeſs. Though we cannot perſuade ourſelves, as hath been already obſerved, that Agamemnon was originally inveſted with power wholly deſpotic, he might, nevertheleſs,

nevertheleſs, in the courſe of a tedious war, whether from ambitious motives in himſelf, or from a neceſſary exertion of power in preſerving order in the army, inſenſibly acquire ſuch a degree of deſpotiſm, as to think himſelf entitled to invade at pleaſure the civil rights of thoſe under his command. Even ſome of the chiefs might, from their attachment to their King, tolerate ſuch an inſenſible increaſe of power. But that this was not generally the caſe with theſe princes, appears from different circumſtances; and from none more than from that heroic and independent ſpirit which they every where diſcover from the rape of Briſeis to the end of the poem. For it ſeems to be contrary to the nature of man, to maintain a ſpirit of heroiſm under a government abſolutely deſpotic, as hath been often remarked and exemplified. To theſe obſervations we may add, that Ovid did not conſider Agamemnon as a deſpotic prince, which appears from his making Ulyſſes and Ajax plead their cauſe before the chiefs in a body;

dy; when they, and not Agamemnon alone, gave a final deciſion in favour of Ulyſſes. Agamemnon, therefore, is no leſs culpable for this act of rapacity than the other princes in tamely ſuffering it.

From this ſtate of Homer's apologue, a general inference may be drawn. As all regal power is, or ought to be, limited, a people or nation will hardly fail to be ſufferers, if that power be permitted to paſs its legal bounds; for power increaſing without reſiſtance, ſoon becomes exorbitant. Had the Tarquins and their ſucceſſors continued to domineer, the warlike ſpirit of the Romans would have inſenſibly degenerated into an abject and ſlaviſh tameneſs. The ſame obſervation may be applied to the Athenians when they expelled the ſons of Piſiſtratus, and reſtored the republican form of government. The characters of Pericles, Cimon, Alcibiades, and of the other celebrated heroes of Athens, would have been leſs illuſtrious, had they acted as Generals under

under a deſpotic tyrant, than by being engaged in the defence and ſupport of republican liberty. But to return; for I find I have here digreſſed.

The abuſe of regal power, then, and the evils ariſing from it, make the moral of Homer's plan; and we have reaſon to believe, that the diſaſtrous effects of any particular vice, as in the caſe of Agamemnon and Achilles, exhibited in proper colours, may be of no leſs utility as a beacon to mankind, than the allurements to virtue in the character of Æneas. Religious and relative duties of various kinds are to be learned from the different parts of the Iliad; as reverence to the Gods, reſpect to parents, patriotiſm, hoſpitality, and friendſhip. When we ſpeak of reverence to the Gods, Jupiter is chiefly to be underſtood, in whoſe hand the poet hath lodged fate itſelf. So that, if we ſuppoſe the ſubordinate deities to be allegorical beings, Homer's theology will be found leſs faulty than has been ſuppoſed.

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The idea of Jupiter ſuſpending the reſt of the deities between heaven and earth by a golden chain, which, as we have reaſon to believe, is wholly an allegory, favours this conjecture; ſo that the liberty Homer hath taken with his deities, is not ſo open to cenſure as the critics would make it. But, whatever was Homer's private opinion, he was obliged to regulate the mythological oeconomy of his poem, according to the popular creed of thoſe times.

The characters of the two heroes are next conſidered; and that of Achilles appears to Father Rapin much the more imperfect of the two. It is true, the character of Æneas is the more amiable; but the Roman poet hath not ſupported it throughout with the ſame propriety as Homer has done that of his hero, who appears conſtantly the ſame. Intrepidity and courage increaſing with danger, a mind iraſcible, impetuous, inexorable, and impatient of oppoſition, characteriſe Achilles. If he ſheds tears, they are

tears

tears of a vindictive paſſion, rather than of tenderneſs. The character of Æneas is marked by piety; that is, a reverential fear of the Gods, paternal, filial, and conjugal affection, with an inviolable attachment to his friends, and a tender remembrance of his ruined country. But we frequently find the hero dwindling into meanneſs, eſpecially during his reſidence at Carthage, and more particularly in his narration of the deſtruction of Troy, which, though remarkably beautiful, and highly poetical, ought not to have come from Æneas. It is unbecoming the character of an hero to conſtitute himſelf his own panegyriſt, or to deſcend to a minute detail of his own adventures. It is difficult to believe the gueſt of Dido, dwelling on his mournful tale, and talking, with a ſorrowful tone of voice, of the formidable Ulyſſes and Achilles, to be the champion who had figured in the ſtreets of Troy while the city was in flames, or who was afterwards to bear down Turnus and his army on the plains

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of Italy. The poet, by attempting to draw a character wholly complete, hath, in effect, given us two, and theſe not very conſiſtent with one another. A poet of the Auguſtan age, we may believe, would be diſpoſed to temper the mercileſs diſpoſitions of the antient heroes, as of Hercules, Theſius, or Achilles, with compaſſion and milder manners; but Virgil ſeems to have carried this too far. Nor doth Achilles, however oppoſite in character to Æneas, ſeem to have been the fierceſt or moſt ungovernable of the Grecian heroes. The Oilean Ajax is ſaid to have been ſo untameable, that ſome of the Gods, conſulting what they ſhould make of him, thought it would be better to deſtroy him outright, than to attempt his reformation. This, though a fable, marks the diſpoſition of the man.

That Virgil hath not ſufficiently ſupported the character of his hero, hath been obſerved by others. The proof of it that St Evremond offers is, however, open to ex-

ception. When the Trojan fleet is involved in a tempeſt between Sicily and Africa, that ingenious critic conſiders it as a meanneſs in Æneas to diſcover fear, and obſerves, that he was fitter to be at the head of an order of monks than of an army. But it is not beneath the dignity of an hero to be overcome when the elements are in conflict on his account, or when he believes himſelf to be the devoted victim againſt which the thunder of heaven is pointed. It would rather argue inſenſibility, if not impiety, to diſcover no feeling on ſuch an emergency.

I preſume to think that Virgil would have conducted his fable better, had he, in place of making his hero relate his own ſtory, put it in the mouth of a ſagacious prieſt, who, being ignorant of Æneas's eſcape from the ſhipwreck, might have painted this hero's character and adventures in colours the moſt captivating to Dido's mind. Thus the Queen may be ſuppoſed to have

contracted

contracted a paſſion for an ideal hero, who being found afterwards to have eſcaped the ſtorm, and to appear at length at Carthage, ought, in Dido's opinion, far to exceed the preceding deſcription. Virgil himſelf being a poet of a melancholy caſt, his manner, which is frequently mournful, is better ſuited to the ſolemnity of a prieſt than to an intrepid hero. The adventures in an epic poem are, or ought to be, juſt within the limits of probability; and the relation of theſe by the adventurer himſelf muſt ever be oſtentatious. Fenelon ſeems to have been on his guard here, ſince he makes his young hero conſtantly aſcribe the ſucceſs of his adventures to the prudence of his tutor.

LETTER

LETTER XIII.

To Lælius.

THOUGH I neither intend a circumſtantial examination of the Iliad and the Æneid, nor a minute compariſon of the two, I ſtill wiſh to ſuggeſt to you a few thoughts, which, I flatter myſelf, may prove an additional inducement to a more critical peruſal of theſe and other epic compoſitions, than the greater part of readers, eſpecially thoſe of the juvenile kind, can ſubmit to. To purſue the ſubject of my laſt letter, then, it may be obſerved, that each of theſe celebrated poems hath had its partiſans with reſpect to the unity and oeconomy of the action or fable, the arrangement of the incidents and epiſodes, with the application of the machinery. In all theſe Father Rapin gives the preference to Virgil.

Homer

Homer hath been conſidered by ſome as Virgil's maſter. But notwithſtanding the obvious imitation of the Roman poet, and the relation between the two poems, there are ſome circumſtances which render it difficult to make an impartial eſtimate of them. The fable of the Æneid being of the poet's creation, and he leading his hero from one country to another at pleaſure, a vaſt field, on which a poetical imagination may operate, is thus opened; nor doth the poet confine himſelf to any particular length of time. In the Iliad the theatre of action is on the field, before the walls of Troy; and the time in which the whole is tranſacted is ſomewhat leſs than two months.

This reſtriction to narrow limits of time and ſpace in the one poet, while the other aſſumes an indefinite latitude in both, makes a remarkable difference with reſpect to the eaſe or difficulty of compoſition. There is hardly any adventure, however excentric, into

into which Virgil might not have led his hero, before the commencement of the war with Turnus, without endangering a charge of impropriety. The whole ſtory of Dido is of this kind, being foreign to the general fable, which is a ſettlement for the Trojans, and the foundation of a mighty empire in Italy. Virgil hath likewiſe, by his plan, been able to avail himſelf of the Odyſſey, in his firſt ſix books. His carrying Æneas into Tartarus, in imitation of the deſcent of Ulyſſes, hath been cenſured by ſome commentators, as unſeaſonably introduced. But the poet will meet with indulgence here, ſince this affords him a favourable opportunity of offering the moſt ſavoury incenſe to Auguſtus, and to the other great families of Rome; and the ſixth book of the Æneid, taken by itſelf, will ever be acceptable to readers of the moſt refined taſte, however open it may be to cenſure, when conſidered as making a part of a whole.

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The texture and diſpoſition of the fable of the Iliad is widely different from that of the Æneid. In the former there is a cauſe, an effect, and a developement or winding up, diſtinctly marked, cloſely connected, and depending on one another. The author, in the courſe of his work, could not, with propriety, loſe ſight of the reſentment of Achilles, as the original cauſe of the diſaſters which befel the Greeks; and this cauſe is ſo far connected with the whole fable, that its removal, or the reconciliation of Achilles with Agamemnon, was neceſſary in bringing about the cataſtrophe. We may judge the better of the juſtneſs of this obſervation by ſuppoſing Homer to have taken the ſame liberty with Virgil, and to have interwoven a love adventure which ſhould occupy one twelfth part, that is, two books, of the Iliad. It is evident this would have appeared a piece of aukward patch-work in the poem.

The fable of the Æneid hath no ſuch con-

connection of parts. There is no original cauſe on which the future incidents depend. Troy being once deſtroyed, it was not neceſſary that the poet, in the courſe of his compoſition, ſhould have any retroſpect to it as a cauſe, which, like that in the Iliad, could admit of a change, or any way influence the ſubſequent parts of the fable. But the truth is, the Æneid may, with propriety, be divided into two diſtinct poems; the one, in imitation of the Odyſſey, containing the voyages of Æneas, replete with many adventures, but theſe not depending upon, or ariſing out of one another, as effects from cauſes; the other, his war and ſettlement in Italy, for which the poet had a pattern in the Iliad.

Were a perſon of taſte, who had never heard of the war of Troy, to read the Iliad for the firſt time, this reader, having learned the character of Achilles, his importance to the Grecian army, and his retreat from it, would feel his deſire for the return of that hero

hero to increaſe with the misfortunes of the Greeks; and his ſolicitude would be wrought up to the higheſt degree, upon finding the army brought to the brink of deſtruction. Hence the reconciliation of Achilles with Agamemnon, his pompous return to the camp of the Greeks, and the various circumſtances attending it, ſo artfully conducted by the poet, would afford the reader a pleaſure proportioned to his former feelings. Thus the opening of the poem, or the cauſe, hath ſuch a relation to the winding up, that a change in the former makes a leading circumſtance in the other. It was therefore neceſſary that the time of the whole action ſhould be ſhort. Had it been otherwiſe, there muſt either have been ſuch chaſms in the poem, as to allow the reader's curioſity and ſolicitous expectations to relax, or too great a number of incidents would have been neceſſary. We have no example of any poet, nor probably of any painter, who have excelled Homer in the powers of invention, and

propriety of diſpoſition. This appears from the variety of incidents, tending to the great event, introduced in ſo ſhort a ſpace of time, and from the happy arrangement of theſe. From this ſtate of things, the Iliad may be ſaid, more than any other epic poem, to be *in ſe ipſum totus teres atque rotundus;* and many readers reap much pleaſure from a property of this poem, even though frequently ignorant of the nature of that property, that is, the unity.

With reſpect to the Æneid, the caſe is different. It was neither intereſting to the poet, nor is it ſo to the reader, whether the time, from the embarkation of Æneas at Troy, to his deſcent in Italy, extended to ten months, or, like the voyages of Ulyſſes, to ten years. I am apt to believe, that, had Virgil been aſked what length of time he had allotted for the action of his fable, he could not have given a ready anſwer, not conſidering it as a matter of great importance in the former half of his poem. Had

the commentators, ſome of whom would make the whole time of the Æneid ten months, others eighteen, confined their inveſtigations to the war in Italy, neglecting the voyages, it would have been more to their purpoſe.

In epic poetry, there is a circumſtance of conſiderable delicacy, to which poets have not always ſufficiently attended, that is, encouraging their heroes in their adventures by favourable predictions. Thus, actions which might juſtly be deemed heroic, can hardly lay claim to that denomination, after theſe aſſurances of ſucceſs, the certainty of which, from ſuch authority, could not be called in queſtion without impiety; nor can their intrepidity in adventures, or patience under ſufferings, any longer attract our applauſe or admiration. Æneas is told by the ghoſt of his wife Creuſa, that, after a long ſeries of toilſome and dangerous adventures, he would find a quiet ſettlement, would lay the foundation

of

of a flouriſhing empire, and would be happy in a ſecond marriage. This is afterwards confirmed by the ghoſt of his father Anchiſes. On the contrary, it was foretold to Achilles, that, if he ſhould go to the war of Troy, he would never return to his country, but would fall before the walls of that city. The former prediction ſinks the heroiſm of the Trojan; the other heightens that of the Grecian chief.

The application of the machinery in theſe two great poems, hath been more the ſubject of cavil than perhaps any other part, though, conſidering the theology of the antients, I ſhould think with leſs reaſon. The wounding of the deities in the Iliad, ſeems, indeed, extravagant. But ſtill ſome allegory, of which we are now ignorant, may be couched here. Father Rapin ridicules Homer for introducing deities when Priam was about to ſue to Achilles for Hector's body. But, to ſuppoſe the King of Troy to quit the city, to go through

through the Grecian camp, and to throw himſelf at the feet of the moſt inexorable of his enemies, and all this without the intervention of a ſupreme power, would have wholly exceeded the bounds of probability. The ſame author applauds Virgil for the introduction of a deity to bring Æneas from Carthage. It is, however, abundantly evident, that the poet had involved both himſelf and his hero ſo far, that no leſs than a deity was neceſſary to extricate them. Æneas had been favourably received, and hoſpitably entertained by the Queen. A conjugal intercourſe was commenced; ſo that a celeſtial mandate was indiſpenſible to ſave a charge of ingratitude and infidelity. A poet may be conſidered as deviating from the oeconomy of the Epopoeia, when he conducts his plot ſo as to render the intervention of a deity neceſſary to give ſanction to an immoral action; nor is all that Segrais, Ruaeus, or Mr Dryden hath ſaid in defence of Virgil, a ſufficient apology for this abuſe of machinery.

In

In comparing the powers of theſe two poets, Homer's ſuperiority appears in nothing more than in marking and ſupporting the characters of his heroes. So great is this difference, that, if one, after having read the two poems, ſhall fail to diſcover that Virgil is inferior to Homer in diverſifying and marking his characters, ſo as to intereſt us in them, that perſon hath either been ſuperficial in his reading, or cannot be ſuppoſed to poſſeſs much taſte for epic compoſition.

Some of the critics, and even ſome of thoſe who are much diſpoſed to favour Homer, have blamed him for carrying his poem beyond his fable. Mr Dacier would make the fable of the Iliad to end with the interview between Priam and Achilles, this hero being then ſoftened into tears. But the termination of Homer's action is the reconciliation of Achilles with Agamemnon and the death of Hector, the cataſtrophe being then complete.

The

The care of dead bodies, by ſurviving friends, was held by the antients, and particularly thoſe of more remote antiquity, a religious duty, and of great importance. The poet, having given an account of the ſavage treatment of Hector before his death, and of his body after it, by Achilles, willingly embraces the opportunity of ſolacing the reader's mind by a circumſtantial relation of the attention given to the dead body of that hero; nor is there a more affecting ſcene in the Iliad than the reception of the dead body into Troy, and the mourning over it.

Another circumſtance, ſeldom neglected by the antients, was to appeaſe the ghoſts of departed friends, to offer ſacrifices to their manes, or to inſtitute games or ſome ſignal ceremonies to their memory. It is not therefore ſurpriſing, that Homer ſhould have conſidered his poem as incomplete without theſe. He had no opportunity of introducing the games in the middle of the poem,

poem, without interrupting the great action, and diverting the reader's mind from it. With Virgil the caſe is wholly different. He had a fair opportunity of introducing the games to the honour of Anchiſes, before Æneas had finiſhed his voyages; and was thus enabled to terminate his poem and fable together.

Upon a reviſal of this letter, and a recollection of what I formerly imparted, I am apt to believe you will think I mean to leſſen your eſteem of the Latin poet. Nothing of this kind is intended. On the contrary, I would recommend the frequent peruſal of Virgil's compoſitions. You will find there excellencies not to be met with in any other poet. No poet ever equalled Virgil in elegant deſcriptions, or in ſetting objects before his readers in lively colours; and this in the feweſt and moſt appoſite words, as well as in periods the moſt melodious and perſpicuous. He is, it is true, an imitator; but his imitations

are

are not ſervile. He frequently varies, and ſometimes improves his originals, as appears from the deſcent of Æneas, the epiſode of Niſus and Euryalus, and the compartments of the ſhield. He recommends, in many paſſages, the principles of virtue in bewitching terms; and was himſelf an admirer of a ſpeculative and innocent life, and of nature in all her ſimplicity, as appears from that exquiſite deſcription of rural felicity at the end of the ſecond Georgic.

A paſſage in the ſixth Eclogue hath proved an handle to ſome to ſuppoſe Virgil's principles to have been thoſe of Epicurus. But it is uncertain whether the Epicurean doctrine of the origin of things be there meant; and, though it were, we have no reaſon to believe that, becauſe he put this in the mouth of Silenus, it made, therefore, an article of his own philoſophical creed. On the contrary, there are other paſſages, particularly in the fourth Georgic and ſixth Æneid, which render it abundant-

ly obvious, that Virgil had adopted the principles of thoſe Greek ſchools, which taught the exiſtence of one ſupreme intelligent cauſe which pervades all things, and regulates the univerſal oeconomy of nature.

I ſhall only obſerve further, that, in order to render the compariſon between Homer and Virgil impartial, it is neceſſary to give proper allowance for the difference of the times in which theſe two poets flouriſhed. In the period of Homer, the manners of men were ſimple, rude, and uncultivated. Hence a modern reader of taſte, upon firſt looking into the Iliad and the Odyſſey, muſt be ſurpriſed to meet with ſome uncouth paſſages, which appear inconſiſtent with the ſtriking marks of genius to be found in the other parts. In the age of Virgil, manners, ſentiments, and language, were brought to the higheſt pitch of cultivation; and what hath been aſcribed to Virgil's judgment, is, in

ſome

ſome degree, owing to the poliſh of the Auguſtan age. Had Homer lived in the days of Virgil, and Virgil in thoſe of Homer, the Iliad and the Odyſſey would have been more refined, the Æneid more barren; for it is not to be doubted that the Roman is much inferior to the Greek poet in poetical invention. Virgil's brevity is not productive of obſcurity; he is every where perſpicuous, no where redundant; and, whatever advantages he might reap from the taſte of the Auguſtan age, this chaſtity of compoſition is to be aſcribed chiefly to his judgment; for none of his contemporary poets were, ſo much as he, poſſeſſed of the art of ſaying no more than juſt enough. Ovid, though a poet of great merit, abounds with redundancies; and, had his works undergone a Virgilian caſtigation, they would have been reduced to a much leſs compaſs than we now have them.

LETTER

LETTER XIV.

To Hortensia.

I HAVE often wiſhed to know which of the four kinds of poetry, mentioned by Horace, is moſt agreeable to your taſte. Lyrics being, more than any of the other three, ſuited to vocal and inſtrumental muſic, for the moſt part, if I miſtake not, attract the approbation of your ſex. Your acquaintance with Shenſton, and with ſome of the beſt tranſlations from the Roman poets, hath, I know, given you an idea of the nature of elegy, which makes the ſecond kind of poetry, epic being the firſt. Elegy is of great antiquity; the date of its origin, as well as its firſt author, being unknown. It was originally appropriated to deaths, misfortunes, and, in general, to melancholy

lancholy ſubjects. It afterwards aſſumed into its department love, whether diſappointed or ſucceſsful.

The Greek and Roman poets believed verſes of unequal lengths to be particularly expreſſive of mournful ſubjects. Hence their elegies conſiſt of a longer and ſhorter verſe alternately. This kind of compoſition ought to appear, eſpecially in Engliſh, ſomewhat proſaic, the ſentiments affecting, the ſtile eaſy and flowing, without diſcovering labour or high poliſhing. To anſwer theſe purpoſes, that ſort of verſe hath been deemed the beſt, in which the rhimes fall alternately, the lines conſiſting of ten ſyllables, as in Gray's Church Yard, and in many others of the elegiac kind. Verſes thus conſtructed, are better ſuited to the humble and plaintive ſtile of elegiacs, than the common heroics uſed in epic poetry.

Dramatic poetry makes the third kind, according to Horace. The great buſineſs of

of comedy is to exhibit virtue and vice in their proper colours. The tools by which it operates with the greateſt ſucceſs, are raillery and ridicule. As, therefore, every virtue hath its oppoſite vice, an author of comedy will, if I miſtake not, effectuate his purpoſe to greater advantage, by hanging out to ridicule any particular vice, than by recommending its oppoſite virtue in grave and moral ſpeeches. It may, therefore, be naturally aſked, whether it be meant that direct and ſerious recommendations to virtue ought never to be found in the comic drama? In anſwer to this, it may be obſerved, that, though the generality of an audience be better pleaſed to laugh than to ſit grave, moral admonitions, if introduced with art and delicacy, and delivered with becoming dignity, have frequently been found productive of the beſt effects. But, if an author dwell much on theſe, and fail to checquer his compoſition ſufficiently with humour and ridicule, the ſucceſs will be precarious. On this rock many a comedy, containing

containing much refined ſentiment and ſeaſonable admonitions, hath made ſhipwreck.

A trite compariſon, that is, painting with poetry, will be ſubſervient to our purpoſe here. The painter finds it a matter of importance to oppoſe light and ſhade ſo happily as to exhibit his leading figures to the greateſt advantage. In this art, too, contraſting is found conducive to attract the attention of ſpectators. It may be aſked, then, whether a double plot in comedy, correſponding to light and ſhade in painting, would not always be uſeful in anſwering the like end? Thoſe who are tenacious of the laws of the drama, will perhaps object here, that this kind of oeconomy cannot be admitted without a ſacrifice of the unity of the fable. It would probably be leſs offenſive to the faſtidious critic, could this ſort of manoeuvre be ſo conducted as to merit the denomination of dramatical epiſode rather than of a double plot. Had the fable

of

of Lord and Lady Townly been ſo much extended as to make a complete comedy, we have reaſon to believe it would not have ſucceeded ſo well as with the ſupport of that of the Wrongheads, though the former be of itſelf a good ſubject for the theatre. Had Moliere interwoven ſome humorous repreſentation with the fable of his Miſanthrope, that piece would have made its way with a better grace than by the aſſiſtance of a mean farce.

The ſame obſervation may be applied to ſome of the novels and adventures, in which the preſent age is ſo fruitful. Le Sage, who may be juſtly held a leading author of this claſs, hath, in his *Gil Blas* and *Diable Boîteux*, ſatirized the eccleſiaſtic, the phyſician, the lawyer, and the officers of juſtice. His ridicule of theſe characters is conducted with art, but ſometimes carried to extravagance. This ingenious author, however, would have ſucceeded ſtill better, had he, in place of the too frequent introduction

duction of this kind of ridicule, treated his reader with a ſingle character of each in the moſt favourable point of view. This would have added a dignity to his general compoſition, and even the ſatire, though it had been introduced more ſparingly, would have acquired a ſtrength and poignancy from the contraſt. When works of this nature conſiſt wholly of ſatire and ridicule, eſpecially if theſe be of the acrimonious kind, without the balance of oppoſite characters, they are productive of effects ſimilar to thoſe of paintings loaded with much deep ſhade, but wanting a due oppoſition of light. Or, to illuſtrate this obſervation from another of the arts, this conduct in authors is a-kin to that of Horace's muſician, who, in place of diverſifying his airs, thrums conſtantly on one or two chords *.

When this oppoſition of characters is neglected by the noveliſt, the dramatiſt, or,

* ——————ut citharoedus
Ridetur, chorda qui ſemper oberrat eadem.

in general, where raillery and ridicule are intended, we are apt to aſcribe the defect to one or more of three cauſes; to a want of art; to a malevolence or ſpleen in the author; or to cauſes of diſguſt which the author may have met with from thoſe whoſe profeſſions or characters are ſatiriſed. This, we are told, was the caſe with Moliere, who, with his wife, being lodged in the houſe of a phyſician in Paris, La Moliere thought herſelf not civilly uſed by the phyſician's wife. The ladies ſoon drew their huſbands into the quarrel; and Moliere, thinking himſelf treated with too much ſeverity by the phyſician, could never afterwards ſpeak or write of phyſicians with temper *.

LETTER

* Vid. de Moliere, a la Haye, 1733.

LETTER XV.

To Hortensia.

IT is with no ſmall pleaſure, good Hortenſia, I write to one who has been more converſant in the polite literature, and fine arts of Greece and Rome, than is common with your ſex: I am thus enabled to illuſtrate my ſubjects from the examples of thoſe times, without hazarding a charge of pedantry.

You are not unacquainted with the controverſy which hath been agitated concerning the two great branches of the drama, whether that relates to the nature of the compoſitions, or to their moral utility. Young minds are naturally diſpoſed to prefer objects which tend to exhilarate, to thoſe which are productive of melancholy,

or

or which extract tears. I cannot, therefore, truſt your deciſion in this matter as impartial; but ſhall defer aſking it till you ſhall have acquired a greater gravity, I will not ſay maturity, of mind. Tragedy is allowed to be the more elevated and the more dignified of the two; and we are apt to affix the ſame idea to its authors. The characters of Euripides and Sophocles, as authors, are generally conſidered as ſuperior to that of Ariſtophanes. Virgil was poſſeſſed of that elevation of mind which we believe to be ſuited to the compoſition of tragedy. But we cannot perſuade ourſelves that he could have condeſcended to attempt the comedies of Plautus or of Terence. The tragedy of Cato conveys a more reſpectable idea of its author than his Haunted Houſe. The exhibition of tragedy acts chiefly upon minds of greater refinement. The influence of comedy is more diffuſive, deſcending to the lower claſſes of people, and thus may be of ſingular utility, when properly conducted.

Such

Such is the relation of tragedy with epic poetry, that one who is qualified to judge with taſte of the latter, can hardly be ſuppoſed ignorant of the properties of the other. There are, however, ſome material differences, ſince the one, being intended to paſs in review before our eyes, cannot admit of ſo great length as an epic poem, which is meant only to be read. In the repreſentation of a tragedy, the mind ought to be intereſted in the action as early as poſſible; and, being rendered ſollicitous about the great event, ought not to be allowed to relax till the cataſtrophe be over. Hence tragedy cannot, with propriety, admit of epiſodes; or, if any thing that can merit this denomination be interwoven with the fable, it ought to be ſo connected with the plot, and the neceſſary incidents, as to keep the paſſions in an unremitting glow. The caſe is not the ſame with an epic poem; for the termination being ſuppoſed ſucceſsful, the poet may aſſume the liberty to operate on a greater variety of paſſions; hence

epiſodes

epiſodes become of ſingular utility to the author in diverſifying his ſubject, and to the reader's mind in finding a relief in the courſe of reading. The ſcenery of tragedy cannot admit of machinery with ſo great propriety as an epic poem, in which the length of the incidents, the ſublime and the marvellous conſpire to render machinery neceſſary. It may be obſerved here, that the machinery of an epic poem, though read with pleaſure, would be offenſive when exhibited on a public theatre. We may judge of this from the machinery of operas, where Gods are ſeen flying through the air with wings, in chariots, or on clouds. The mechaniſm of theſe being readily diſcovered by an attentive ſpectator, the whole appears puerile, and becomes a proper ſubject of the burleſque. Hence the ſucceſs of the *opera comique* at Paris, and of the like entertainments elſewhere. They who attend operas ſolely for the ſake of the muſic, would do well to ſhut their eyes, while their ears are entertained.

There

There is no circumſtance in which dramatical compoſitions ought to coincide with the epic, more than in what relates to the characters and to the moral. The former, in both, ought to be ſtrongly and diſtinctly marked, eſpecially thoſe which make up the great lines of the fable, ſo as to intereſt us deeply in the fate of the leading perſonages. In both theſe kinds of compoſition, the moral ought invariably to conciliate the mind to the different branches of virtue, and to fortify it againſt evil, whether moral or natural, and conſequently ought to bring vice into diſcredit, by painting it in its proper colours.

Tragedy, from its effects on the mind, may be divided into two kinds; the one exciting horror, the other acting only upon the more refined paſſions of ſympathy and ſorrow. The fable of the former commonly conſiſts in the perpetration of enormous crimes, terminating in the puniſhment of the guilty. In the other, the fable, though

though variouſly conducted, as authors find their purpoſes require, generally exhibits one or more perſonages, whom we are led to eſteem and admire, ſo involved in adverſity and perplexing difficulties, as to be brought under the unavoidable neceſſity of undergoing ſevere ſufferings, or of making a ſacrifice of life itſelf, rather than relax in the cauſe of virtue or honour.

The latter is the proper ſubject of tragedy. We are, it is true, not diſſatisfied to ſee the perpetrators of murder, or of other crimes, brought to condign puniſhment. But an author cannot be ſuppoſed to entertain high ſentiments of the morals of his audience, who can believe the apologue of ſuch a fable neceſſary to improve their minds, or to correct their manners. In a fable of the other kind, though we be thrown into diſtreſs, and become extremely ſolicitous for the fate of the hero or heroine, we are, nevertheleſs, conſcious of a ſatisfactory compenſation in virtue coming

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off triumphant, though at the expence of life. The moral here not only tends to improve and refine the mind, but is, indeed, a touchſtone, as well of its worth, as of its taſte. We have, further, a ſolution of the problem, which hath been often agitated, why we wiſh to be preſent at the repreſentation of tragedies, though their terminations be fatal and mournful. Plato, or perhaps ſome other, obſerved, that the death of Socrates gave him no uneaſineſs; for that the loſs of ſo great a man was ſufficiently balanced by a chearful ſacrifice of life, when the cauſe of virtue called for it. Mr Addiſon, we are told, intended a tragedy on this ſubject; nor doth hiſtory furniſh a better, could modern theatres be for once prevailed with to throw amours out of the drama.

Conſiſtent with theſe obſervations, I cannot help diſſenting from Ariſtotle, the great critic of the Greeks, who, in his Art of Poetry, ſays, the leading character in a tra-

gedy ought neither to be good nor bad, if ſuch a middle character can be found. We can never be greatly intereſted in characters which are not ſtrongly marked by good qualities. A man may bring misfortunes upon himſelf, by yielding to the frailties common to human nature, though the character may be otherwiſe good and reſpectable. But, in this laſt circumſtance, at leaſt, the character fails to be good; and we would be ſtill more intereſted, were the leading perſonage to be brought under misfortunes, not from any fault of his own, but by the machinations of others, or from ſome unexpected or unforeſeen event. The character of Cato is wholly unexceptionable, were it not for his laſt action, which we condemn, not for its immorality alone, but taken in a political ſenſe. We conſider him here not as a man, but as a citizen. A variety of events might have happened afterwards, by which that patriot might have been uſeful to the ſtate, particularly in the efforts to reſtore the republican form

of

of government. Had Cato been condemned to death by Caeſar, and had he, like Socrates, ſubmitted to his fate, without repining or regretting his misfortune, then would the character, as the hero of a tragedy, been complete.

LETTER XVI.

To Hortensia.

TO purſue the ſubject of tragedy, beſide the two kinds mentioned in a former letter, a third may, perhaps without impropriety, be added; that is, when the moſt intereſting parts of the piece turn upon a conflict of paſſions raiſed in the minds of the leading characters. Thus, in the Cid of Corneille, love, honour, duty, excite tumults in the minds of Rodrigue and Chimene, which prove a ground-work for much ingenious reflection, and refined ſentiment.

ſentiment. The former is brought under the indiſpenſible neceſſity of avenging the injury done to his father, while Chimene, though unable to diveſt herſelf of her love to Rodrigue, finds it inconſiſtent with a Lady's character, to admit the addreſſes of a man, by whoſe hand ſhe had loſt her father. The young hero is here reduced to a moſt perplexing dilemma. If he declines that duty which the indignity done to his father and his own honour call for, he thereby forfeits all claim to the favour of every Lady who would ſupport female dignity; and, by the ſucceſsful diſcharge of this duty, all hopes of returns to his love evaniſh. This conflict, then, in the minds of the two lovers, becomes the moſt delicate and intereſting part of that celebrated tragedy.

We may well diſtinguiſh between tragical ſubjects, as that expreſſion is commonly underſtood, and ſubjects proper for tragedies. Hiſtories of all ages teem with the former,

former, and examples of them will be found in one part of the world or another, as long as irregular paſſions ſhall continue to agitate the mind of man. Shakeſpeare was not delicate in the choice of his ſubjects, which muſt be aſcribed, not to a defect of taſte in that author, but to the period in which he wrote. Subjects which act forcibly upon the mind, affecting it with awe and horror, were then better received than thoſe which touch the more delicate paſſions. It is not Shakeſpeare's fables that pleaſe, but his peculiar manner of treating them; yea the improprieties of theſe fables are a certain proof of the natural powers of that author. It can be but little gratifying to a mind poſſeſſed of a delicate taſte, to hear plots laid for murders, and to be told afterwards that theſe murders have been perpetrated with the diſagreeable circumſtances attending them. An age of leſs refinement than the preſent might reliſh apparitions, enchantments, the equivocal predictions of witches, and the like

like machinery; nor was that author blameable for availing himſelf of it, while it could ſerve his purpoſe. But Shakeſpeare, from an intimate acquaintance with nature, hath excelled all other dramatiſts, in tracing and unfolding the feelings of the ſoul, particularly in touching that canker-worm which attends a conſciouſneſs of guilt, and which faſtens on human minds; ſo that, whether aſleep or awake, they are unable ever afterwards to ſhake themſelves looſe of this tormentor.

We may lay it down as an invariable rule, that the more culpable or criminal the ſuffering parties of a tragedy are, our ſolicitude for their fate will be the leſs. It is not enough that the hero of a tragedy be innocent; he ought, from a greatneſs of mind, and a conſciouſneſs of rectitude, to meet his misfortunes with intrepidity, and to triumph even in death. Thus, while our ſympathy and tears are drawn out, we feel a tacit ſatisfaction in ſeeing virtue and

a nobleneſs of ſoul ſuperior to every natural evil; and we are able to account for our deſire to be preſent at the exhibition of tragedies, though their terminations be diſaſtrous and mournful. What hath added an appearance of difficulty to the ſolution of this problem, is the improper choice of ſubjects. A well diſpoſed mind would not wiſh to witneſs the repreſentation of Hamlet, of Richard III. or of Macbeath, for the ſake of the fables alone. It is Shakeſpeare's ſingular and various methods of deſcribing the workings of the human mind, and particularly its agitations after the perpetration of the worſt of crimes, that attract our applauſe; but every dramatiſt is not a Shakeſpeare.

It is to be regretted, that the admired author did not chooſe his ſubjects of the kind mentioned above, ſuch as the fate of Regulus, of Phocion, or of Socrates. It is not doubted but theſe will generally be held barren ſubjects; and ſo they would prove

prove to the greater part of dramatical authors. Were we, for the firſt time, to hear, perhaps in a few ſentences, and in the common courſe of converſation, the ſtory of Lear and his daughters, we would not readily believe that any one would attempt a tragedy from materials ſo unpromiſing. Any of the three ſubjects juſt mentioned would be found, in Shakeſpeare's hand, much ſuperior to that of Lear.

The French and Engliſh authors have entertained the public with a controverſy relating to the merits of Shakeſpeare, compared with thoſe of Racine and Corneille. Shakeſpeare ſeems to me to differ ſo widely from theſe two French authors, as hardly to admit of a compariſon. Some people are delighted with a garden highly and regularly dreſſed; the walks ſmooth, with their edges cut in right lines; eſpaliers drawn exactly parallel to theſe; the trees planted in exact order, and every thing

conducted

conducted with the ſame preciſion. Others are better pleaſed with a vaſt extended foreſt, abounding with ſtately and towering trees, with ſhrubs, wild flowers, and vegetables of all kinds; with unequal grounds, having in ſome places ſtupendous rocks, pouring down natural cataracts; in others, ſmooth hills or plains, with gentle rills of water, and other like objects. The garden is Racine and Corneille. The foreſt is Shakeſpeare. But why ſhould we condemn the admirers of either for being pleaſed with the excellencies of the one in preference to thoſe of the other? We ſee nature both in the garden and in the foreſt. In the former, art, applied to nature, appears every where. In the other, artleſs nature appears in a bold and majeſtic luxuriancy.

There is reaſon to believe, that a foreigner ſeldom, if ever, acquires a knowledge of the Engliſh language ſo complete as to underſtand Shakeſpeare thoroughly. He may

be able to converſe in Engliſh, and to read the Engliſh authors of the preſent century without difficulty, and yet be unqualified to diſcover Shakeſpeare's meaning and the ſcope of his language in many places. I believe this obſervation will be found general with reſpect to the authors of other nations and foreigners. A native of Britain may be able to converſe in French, and to read the authors of the reign of Louis XIV. and downwards, with eaſe and pleaſure, while the poignancy of Rabelais's wit, and even his meaning, may eſcape him. This is the caſe with myſelf; and yet a native of France, though his knowledge, taſte, and genius, be ſuppoſed not ſuperior to mine, will, in the courſe of his reading, loſe nothing of the humour of that author. One will always read with much diſadvantage when he is obliged to conſult a gloſſary for the meaning of words; or, when the import of a ſentence cannot be diſcovered without an application to others for an interpretation. In ſuch reſearches, the ſpirit

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of an author evaporates; nor do we ever recover it again in a degree ſo ſatisfactory as when we catch it in the firſt reading.

Shakeſpeare, in his deepeſt tragedies, frequently introduces low characters, making them ſpeak in their own vulgar and proverbial ſtyle. He hath likewiſe often recourſe to mean objects for his figures and metaphors. Theſe, when tranſlated into the language of a people rigidly attached to the dignity of the Cothurnus, have an awkward, and ſometimes a ludicrous appearance. But the delineations of nature by this author, however coarſe, are, for the moſt part, bold, juſt, and ſtriking. They may well be compared to thoſe of Hemſkirk, or Albert Durer; whereas the genius and taſte of the two French dramatiſts correſpond to thoſe of Grignon, or the like artiſts, whoſe works are noted for minute and laboured finiſhing. The former daſh on without reſerve, regardleſs of ſuch ſmall ſlips as will not offend a liberal critic; while the others, ſollicitous

ſollicitous to avoid improprieties, however ſmall, dwell with tedious and unwearied labour on high poliſhing. Theſe have their partiſans and admirers, each according to his reſpective ſtile; but who can lay claim to a preferable taſte, I will not preſume to ſay.

I would not have you underſtand me here as believing that the drama may be conducted without regard to the unities. The contrary is the truth. It muſt be owned, notwithſtanding the preceding obſervations, that Shakeſpeare, while we give him full credit for his merit in delineating nature, hath not been ſo happy in conducting his fables. I am aware that many advocates have undertaken his defence in this circumſtance; but it is not uncommon, when we contract a ſtrong attachment to any particular perſon or author, not only to overlook his faults, but even to imagine we ſee beauties in them. I know likewiſe that ſome modern critics have condemned

the

the unities of the antients, conſidering them as fetters to a bold and enterpriſing genius. Theſe have been declared as a-kin to ſhackles fixed to the limbs of a fine dancer. When we have recourſe to figure and metaphor, in order to elucidate our ideas to others, we are ſometimes apt to miſlead ourſelves. Why ſhould we conſider Addiſon to have been in fetters when he compoſed his Cato? Or, can we declare the death of that Roman an improper ſubject for a tragedy; becauſe that event, and the incidents attending it, happened in the ſame place, and in a ſhort ſpace of time? And ſo of many other ſubjects equally fit for tragedy.

If an author, in treating the like dramatical ſubjects, find himſelf under the neceſſity of flying to diſtant places, and of protracting his ſubject to a great length of time, for the ſake of incidents, he muſt aſcribe this to the ſterility of his genius, and not to the ſubject itſelf; for an author is allowed

allowed to invent incidents, provided he do not exceed probability. I am far from inſinuating here that Shakeſpeare laboured under a defect of invention. On the contrary, he every where diſcovers a remarkable fecundity of genius, as well as a rich, though not always regular, imagination. Yea, the applauſe he hath acquired from his pictures of Nature, while he was unſupported by the unities, is a proof of his merit. In Shakeſpeare's time the taſte for theatrical repreſentations was not delicate; nor doth it appear that the laws of the drama were well underſtood, perhaps not by Shakeſpeare himſelf.

It appears to me that the Iliad can hardly be read with a degree of taſte and attention ſo ſmall, as not to diſcover the effect of the unities. Such is the relation of the opening of this poem with the cataſtrophe, and of the intermediate parts with both, that the whole, if the expreſſion will be allowed, is ſo rounded into itſelf, as to

ſtrike

ſtrike the mind with all the force that an epic poem can be ſuppoſed to poſſeſs. This is not the caſe with the Æneid. The poet was miſled by keeping the Odyſſey too much in his eye; and this poem, notwithſtanding its excellencies, is, in many parts, wild and excentric. The Æneid, when divided into portions, and theſe conſidered as diſtinct compoſitions, merit well to be ranked among the greateſt and moſt diſtinguiſhed efforts of poetical genius. But, as a whole, will always be found to produce a more feeble effect upon the mind of a reader than the Iliad.

The controverſy relating to the unities might, perhaps, be accommodated, were hiſtorical repreſentations to be exhibited on the theatre; but, in the ſenſe in which the term *drama* hath been hitherto underſtood, and according to its laws, theſe hiſtorical ſhews ought not have a claim to the denomination of dramatical compoſitions, eſpecially to that of tragedy. In this the

mind is brought into a ſtate of anxious ſuſpenſe, which ought to increaſe till the developement of the piece. But this effect can never be produced by portions of hiſtory tagged to one another, in which the author would be relieved of a reſtriction to five acts; ſince he could extend them to any number he ſhould think proper. Few, it is preſumed, will venture to aſſert, that, becauſe the death of Phocion, of Socrates, of Philopoemon, and of many others, are excellent ſubjects for tragedies; therefore, their whole lives would be ſtill better, as furniſhing a greater variety of incidents. Horace's Art of Poetry hath been eſteemed among the moſt valuable remains of antiquity. The unities may be conſidered as the ſoul of this poem, the author having them in his eye almoſt from the beginning to the end. But ſuch of the moderns as reprobate the unities, or, at leaſt, hold them as unneceſſary, muſt conſequently conſider the better part of this poem as inſignificant and uſeleſs.

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The propriety of acting farces after tragedies hath been doubted. The diviſion of tragedies in the preceding paragraphs will help to lead us to a deciſion in this queſtion. When the mind hath been overcaſt with gloom and horror, by a tragedy more productive of this effect than any moral benefit, a well choſen farce may be of uſe in diſpelling theſe clouds. But, when the plot of the tragedy is of that kind which exhibits the cauſe of truth, of honour, of friendſhip, or whatever other noble principle, generouſly ſupported, and boldly maintained, however fatal to the parties; the only tendency, even of the beſt farce, is to obliterate the impreſſions, and undo the improvement which the mind may be ſuppoſed to have reaped from a fable ſo well conducted.

LETTER XVII.

To Hortensia.

SOME time ago, upon returning from the theatre, you dropped a few ſtrictures on the action of the night. Theſe appeared to me ingenious and juſt. One of the company, however, inclining to be diſputatious, and calling the propriety of your obſervations in queſtion, brought on a reaſoning of ſome length. This controverſy, occupying my mind afterwards, led me to commit to writing, next morning, a few thoughts on theatrical action. Theſe ſhall make the ſubject of this letter, which, I flatter myſelf, will not be the leſs acceptable, that it follows ſome others, containing reflections on dramatical compoſition.

Such

Such are the difficulties, and ſo great the delicacy attending the functions of a comedian, that, among the multiplicity of them who have appeared, in almoſt every age, ſince the days of Æſchylus, very few have been found attracting the notice of hiſtorians. The Auguſtan age ſeems to have furniſhed only two who merited the denomination of capital actors. A few others are mentioned by the Roman hiſtorians; but theſe, we have reaſon to believe, were rather pantomimes than comedians.

We never fail to obſerve, among comedians, a remarkable ſimilarity in acting the ſame parts. This proceeds from their copying after one another, which is mimickry, not original action. Were thoſe who are intended for the theatre to exerciſe their minds in an attentive peruſal of the moſt approved dramatical compoſitions, and thus to form to themſelves ideas of the propriety of theatrical qualifications, we ſhould ſee more original and more varied repreſentations

ſentations than our theatres commonly afford. A comedian no ſooner becomes the minion of the public, than he is adopted by his fraternity as a ſtandard of action and an object of imitation. But, however much the original action may pleaſe, the imitation generally diſguſts. Nor is it always in the power even of the moſt accompliſhed comedian, to regulate his theatrical conduct according to his own taſte. For the populace, conſtituting themſelves judges, take upon them to applaud and condemn licentiouſly; and the middle or lower ranks of people are ſeldom pleaſed, unleſs theatrical repreſentations exceed nature. Hence extravagant vociferation, and unnatural motions of the body, are frequently applauded by the populace, but tacitly condemned by more delicate judges *.

Were

* Je dois le ſavoir, puiſque je viens de débuter à Madrid, où j'ai été hué et ſifflé comme tous les diables, quoique je duſſe être fort aplaudi: car j'ai crié, j'ai pris des tons

Were a comedian poſſeſſed of powers ſufficient to command the paſſions of his audience by language alone, that comedian would be parſimonious of the agitations of his body, and would only avail himſelf of theſe when they ſhould become indiſpenſible. The dignity of tragedy depends much on this circumſtance.

A comedian of a rich invention, and refined taſte, may improve a character beyond what the author had conceived it in his compoſition. But, where invention and taſte are wanting, a comedian, from this poverty

tons extravagans, et Je ſuis ſorti cent fois de la nature. De plus, j'ai mis en déclamant le poing ſous le menton de ma princeſſe. En un mot, j'ai joué dans le goût des grands acteurs de ce pais là; et cependant le méme public qui trouve en eux ces manières fort agréables, n'a pu les ſouffrir en moi. Voyez ce que c'eſt que la prévention.—Thus far le Sage, meaning to ſhew that an imitation of the beſt actors, by thoſe of inferior rank, is frequently irkſome to the ſpectators; and likewiſe, that the beſt actors themſelves are occaſionally obliged to exceed nature, that they may pleaſe the populace.

poverty of mind, and inability to judge of the propriety or impropriety of characters from reading alone, is under the neceſſity of reſtricting himſelf to the mimickry of the more ſtriking manners of thoſe within the ſphere of his knowledge, and is among his fraternity of ſuperior rank, what a copiſt is among painters, noted for taſte and execution. In place of delineations of nature, as ſhe exhibits herſelf in common life, to which the powers of ſuch an actor are unequal, he can give us only ſketches of her excentricities; and, by dwelling on ſome ſpecific oddities, he remains ignorant of the oeconomy of the *genus*. A comedian of this kind is rarely, if ever, qualified for the more refined parts of comedy, much leſs for the mournful and ſolemn dignity of tragedy, or in general, for the more elevated and refined parts of the drama. One may be equal to the characters of a Wrong-head, or a Moody, while thoſe of a Townly, Manly, or an Hamlet, are beyond his reach. Theſe actors, however, are frequently

quently of ſingular uſe, when buffoonry makes the great lines of the drama.

LETTER XVIII.

To Lælius.

WERE I to claim a return for ſome thoughts on epic poetry, lately communicated, it would be to have your own ſentiments concerning thoſe parts of Homer and Virgil which ſeem to you the moſt beautiful. It is not meant that you ſhould be minutely critical. By a peruſal of this kind, we are apt to dwell ſo long on particular paſſages, that their relations with other more diſtant parts, eſcaping our obſervation, we conſider them rather as diſtinct poems, than as members conſpiring to conſtitute a whole. It will ſuffice that your mind be diſengaged from other ſubjects. You will find theſe two poems

poems ſo alluring, that little or no exertion on your ſide will be requiſite to preſerve a due degree of attention. I wiſh to know how far the opinions of others in theſe matters coincide with my own; and likewiſe what parts of theſe great works of taſte are chiefly affecting to young minds. I conveyed my ideas of elegiac and dramatic compoſition to Hortenſia. You will have an opportunity of ſeeing them afterwards.

Lyric poetry makes Horace's fourth branch. The Greek language is, more perhaps than any other in the world, poſſeſſed of properties ſuited to poetical rhythm of all kinds. It is ſuperior to the Latin in ſoftneſs and flexibility. Its various parts, being ſuſceptible of compoſition and decompoſition to a high degree, render it no leſs ſignificant in ſenſe than expreſſive of ſounds: In the former reſpect it is always uſeful; in the latter, as deſcriptions require. Homer and Pindar have proved it to be equally fitted for epic and lyric compoſitions.

ſitions. No language ſupports the majeſty of the ſublime better than the Greek: In deſcribing battles, ſtorms, or the like, none is more ſonorous or occaſionally harſh; and even in delineations of mean ſubjects, a dignity may be preſerved, as appears from ſome paſſages in the Iliad and Odyſſey, which we can hardly believe could have been ſo happily expreſſed in any other language.

The Latin language, when compared with the Greek, is hard and untractable; and, had it not been for Virgil and Horace, we could not have believed it poſſible to adapt that language ſo happily to the action and incidents which make up the Epopoeia, or to the quantities indiſpenſible in the ſtructure of lyrics. In theſe two kinds of poetry, language is brought to the ſevereſt proof; and they being conſidered as the two extremes, the intermediate kinds, as elegiac, paſtoral, epiſtolary, and dramatical, having a looſer texture, are of eaſier conſtruction. The unſucceſsful efforts of

the Roman poets in lyric compoſition, aſcertain the difficulties attending it. Quintilian obſerves, that Horace was almoſt the only lyric poet among the Romans worthy of being read *. The value of this kind of compoſition, beſides the melody ariſing from the variety of its rhythmic quantities, conſiſts in comprehending much thought in few words. In tranſlating the Odes of Horace into Engliſh, or perhaps into any modern language, we ſhall find that the multiplicity of particles, occupying a great ſhare of the verſes, which are commonly ſhort in lyrics, tend to render the compoſition diffuſive and languid. We have had many tranſlations of theſe Odes into Engliſh; and in them ſome of the tranſlators, particularly Mr Francis, have diſcovered much art and taſte. But, it is preſumed, thoſe who are thoroughly acquainted with the original, will be ſenſible, that the beſt Engliſh tranſlation, when compared with the

* At lyricorum idem Horatius fere ſolus legi dignus.
Inſtitut. Orator. lib. 10. cap. 1.

the Latin, is inferior in ſtrength and ſolidity. Upon the whole, if any Engliſh poet be found to excell in lyric compoſition, that poet may be conſidered as poſſeſſing uncommon powers in verſification.

Some have expreſſed their ſurpriſe that Horace, in his diviſion and arrangement of poetical compoſitions, ſhould not have mentioned paſtoral poetry; but it is ſufficiently evident, that the poet intended no more than ſuch compoſitions as differ from one another in their rhythm, and the ſtructure of their verſes: Epic poetry is, or ought to be, conſtantly in heroic hexameters; for, though heroics be always hexameters, it doth not therefore follow that hexameters always make heroic verſes. For this you may conſult Lord Roſcommon's notes on Horace's art of poetry *. Elegiacs conſiſt of verſes of ſix and five feet alternately; and epiſtles compoſed in this way, eſpecially when treating of love, and of

* Verſe 74.

of a plaintive nature, were properly denominated elegies. Ovid's heroic epiſtles are the beſt examples of this kind. Dramatical compoſitions, particularly comedy, were of a looſer texture, and differing leſs from proſe. The comedies of Plautus and Terence are in meaſured quantities; and it is probable the actors of theſe plays never ſpoke without a pipe, or ſome other inſtrument playing along. By this the voice and numbers were modulated, not unlike our recitative. But theſe circumſtances have not hitherto been well aſcertained. In lyrics, the proſodaical laws, and the kinds of verſes, are various; and it may be obſerved, in general, that greater attention is requiſite in reading lyrics than any other kind of poetry. The reaſon of this is, that the rhythmic order being indiſpenſible, and the lines frequently very ſhort, the poet is obliged to arrange the words as he can find place for them, according to their quantities. Thus words agreeing with, or governing others, are often much disjoined,

and

and the ſenſe rendered leſs obvious. This kind of poetry, however, when artfully conſtructed, is, from its variety, and the melody of its numbers, particularly agreeable. Were I to adviſe a young man to commit to his memory any part of the Roman poets, it would be the ſelect odes of Horace. But I would adviſe him, at the ſame time, not to be forward to quote theſe in company. This may ſometimes be done ſeaſonably, and without pedantry. But, for the moſt part, this ſort of claſſical oſtentation marks rather a circumſcribed than an extenſive acquaintance with antient authors.

With reſpect to the nature of paſtoral compoſition, I cannot help diſſenting from all thoſe who have treated this branch, and whoſe inveſtigations of it I have had opportunities of ſeeing. I ſhall, therefore, give you my thoughts on this ſubject more explicitly than if my ideas of it had coincided with thoſe of others.

LETTER

LETTER XIX.

To Lælius.

PASTORAL poetry hath been no leſs the ſubject of criticiſm than the other kinds; nor doth it yet appear to be ſufficiently aſcertained what ought properly to come under this denomination. The poets, having figured to themſelves a ſtate of rural felicity, would exclude from paſtoral compoſition every thing that can be ſuppoſed to break in upon the innocence, ſimplicity, and happineſs of that life. Such, at leaſt, is ſuppoſed to have been the condition of the antient Arcadian ſhepherds. Hence we hear of nothing but love and eternal youth, which, with rural ſcenery, have been deemed ſufficient to make up the materials of paſtoral poetry. Theſe have been, in general, the opinions of the French,

French, and of many other foreign authors. Some Engliſh critics have entertained different ſentiments, eſpecially in examining modern paſtorals.

The idea of the golden age ſeems to have been of a very old date in Greece. Some would make it coeval with Cadmus. Ovid, whether for the better connecting of his transformations, carries this age much farther back both in Aſia and in Greece, as well as the felicity of the Arcadian paſtoral life in the latter. Greece, however, or a great part of it, was probably in a ſtate of barbarity after the days of Cadmus. But it is not improbable that one coming from Phoenicia, or the adjacent country, might, among other manners and cuſtoms, introduce the paſtoral life. Cadmus is believed to have been a contemporary of Moſes or of Joſhua, and ſo to have lived between ſix and ſeven hundred years before the commencement of the Olympiads. Sir Iſaac Newton makes the period of Cadmus much

much later. It appears, from the writings of Moſes, that the paſtoral life was then followed in the Upper Ægypt, in Idumea, the inland parts of the Phoenician territories, and the neighbouring countries. What renders it more probable that the Greeks had the idea of the golden age from theſe countries, and in thoſe mythic times, is, that we hear more of the Syrian Gods than of any other deities in the Arcadian plains, particularly Apollo, Mercury, Pan, Diana, and Venus, a Goddeſs of the Cyprians, who, if not ſubject to the Phoenicians, had a cloſe intercourſe with them.

I ſhall hazard another conjecture, relating to a fable ſomewhat a-kin to the ſubject before us. Seſoſtris, in returning from his Indian expedition, left his nephew Prometheus in Colchos. Prometheus formed a man of clay, animating him with fire ſtolen from heaven; that is, he civilized the Colchians. Seſoſtris had a great number of

women in his army, under the conduct of Minerva, who did not die till the army came to Thrace. Minerva was celebrated for her powers in the art of weaving. A number of these women being left with Prometheus and his Ægyptians, would teach the Colcheans the manufacture of wool, which had been known in Ægypt long before that time. It was a custom in those times with the Ladies of the highest rank to exercise themselves in these arts, as all antiquity informs us. When the Argonauts brought Medea from Colchos, she and her female attendants would instruct or improve the Corinthians in the manufacture of wool, and art of weaving. Thus the natives of Arcadia, which reached almost to the gates of Corinth, and the people of that city, would reap a mutual advantage; the one from the culture of sheep, the other from the manufacture of wool. Hence the poets, with propriety, feigned the Argonauts to have brought the golden fleece from Colchos. In those times,

whoever made extraordinary diſcoveries or improvements in the arts were deified, as was the caſe with Ceres and Minerva. But Medea, though believed to poſſeſs ſupernatural powers, being of a vindictive diſpoſition, and charged with criminal practices, was held a ſorcereſs, and branded with witchcraft. But, waving further conjectures concerning the primeval ſtate of Arcadia, I return to my ſubject.

Paſtoral compoſition being ſuppoſed deſcriptive only of the ſcenery and felicity of the golden age, of the Arcadian ſtate, or of the Saturnian reign, authors of genius, who have aſſumed this department, have found it difficult to confine their compoſitions within ſo narrow limits; and, therefore, of whatever merit their works may be poſſeſſed, they are ſeldom allowed, eſpecially by the more ſevere critics, to claim the denomination of paſtorals, whether the tranſgreſſion be in too great refinement of language, elevation of thought, or

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in the introduction of ſome circumſtances ſuppoſed inconſiſtent with this ſtate of innocence and felicity. But if we abate ſomewhat of this ideal and almoſt divine ſtate, and ſuppoſe it to partake more of the common fate of humanity, ſtill allowing it to exceed all other kinds of life in ſimplicity, innocence, and happineſs, we ſhall thereby acquire a larger field, and more materials for paſtoral compoſition. Let the different ſtages of life be admitted, let the youths ſing chiefly of their loves; thoſe of the middle period may be ſuppoſed to have a more intimate acquaintance with Nature, and, therefore, may uſe figures, alluſions, and language ſomewhat more refined; and the aged may, among others, adopt religious ſubjects, which, with the antients, conſiſted of mythological and allegorical fable, of which Virgil hath given a ſpecimen in his Silenus.

Beſides the different ſtages of life, the different ranks of ſhepherds may be ſuppoſed

poſed to diverſify this kind of poetry. The maſters, with the ſuperior and inferior ſervants, making likewiſe three degrees. Thus the paſtoral life will be little, if at all, different from what it ſeems to have been in the earlier periods of the world. In Sicily, in Greece, particularly in Arcadia and in ſome parts of Italy, about the time of Saturn, the paſtoral life, we have reaſon to believe, was a-kin to the patriarchal ſtate deſcribed by Moſes; the heads of families, with ſervants of different ranks under them, obſerving ſuch a ſimplicity of diet and manners, as greatly promoted health and longevity. The Polyphemi of Sicily are believed to have been a family noted for prudence and great wealth, conſiſting chiefly in ſheep, or cattle of different kinds; the ſingle eye in the forehead is poetically expreſſive of the one, as the gigantic bodies are of the other.

Virgil, whether from a reſpect to this threefold diviſion, of the ages and ranks of ſhepherds,

ſhepherds, hath been particularly attentive to as many degrees of paſtoral. Of theſe the moſt elevated is ſuited to ſhepherds, who, from their advanced age, greater experience, and better fortunes, may be ſuppoſed poſſeſſed of a more refined taſte, and of knowledge ſomewhat more extenſive than others of an inferior rank and age. The Pollio and Silenus are of this kind. In theſe the poet, in a paſtoral character, takes the whole narration upon himſelf, there being no dialogue of ſhepherds from the beginning to the end. In the ſecond kind, the poet, after a ſhort introduction, puts the remaining part of the paſtoral in his ſhepherds mouths, leaving them to tell their ſtory. Of this ſort the ſeventh and eighth Eclogues are examples. The loweſt kind of paſtoral, ſuch as the Tityrus, Palaemon, and Moeris, are dramatical throughout, the poet nowhere deigning to take a ſhare.

Rigid criticiſm hath denied the denomination

nation of paſtorals to the Pollio and Silenus, as likewiſe to the tenth, entitled Gallus; conſidering them as ſuperior to paſtoral poetry, both in diction and ſentiment. Nor is this cenſure altogether groundleſs. It will, however, admit of alleviation, when we conſider that the ſtate of Italy for ſome time after the Saturnian age, was paſtoral; that, about thoſe times, the Sibilline oracles were recent, and may well be ſuppoſed to have been the ſubject of ſpeculation among ſhepherds of greater experience. Nor is it likely that Virgil was the firſt in Italy who had made them the ſubject of his ſong; for it is remarkable, that, though this poet be not inferior to any in poetical merit, all his compoſitions are to be conſidered rather as imitations than originals.

With reſpect to the ſixth Eclogue, entitled Silenus, the Poet was ſenſible that the Epicurean philoſophy (if this be the ſubject, as hath been believed), and the mythological tales in that paſtoral, were improper themes

themes for ſhepherds; and, therefore, conſidering the whole as a *nodus vindice dignus*, he judiciouſly introduceth a God, who ſings in elevated ſtrains to his aſtoniſhed Sylvan audience. The tenth paſtoral is leſs open to objection than the other two.

LETTER XX.

To Lælius.

TO purſue the ſubject of paſtoral: "The "language of Virgil's Eclogues," obſerves an eminent critic *, "is too pure, "the poet frequently forgetting that he is "among peaſants." There is, it is true, a dignity and elevation of language in the three paſtorals mentioned in a former letter, not to be found in any of the other ſeven. But purity of language, and even a

* Guardian, No 40.

a dignity of expreſſion, are not incompatible with ſimplicity, a circumſtance indiſpenſible in all kinds of paſtoral compoſition. Virgil's genius could not, without difficulty, be confined to this ſimplicity, being frequently apt to make ſallies beyond it. He had, however, the art and judgment to preſerve, for the moſt part, a beautiful ſimplicity, even in his moſt elevated paſtorals. In the ſix following verſes, the three former diſcover more art and refinement than ought to be found in paſtoral compoſition; whereas the three latter are remarkable for their ſimplicity and elegance.

Pauca tamen ſuberunt priſcae veſtigia fraudis,
Quae tentare Thetin ratibus, quae cingere muris
Oppida, quae jubeant telluri infindere ſulcos.
Alter erit tum Typhis et altera quae vehat Argo.
Delectos heroas; erunt etiam altera bella,
Atque iterum ad Trojam magnus mittetur Achilles.

They who have laid down rules for paſtoral poetry, ſeem not to have attended ſufficiently to the difference between the antient

tient and modern paſtoral ſtate. The occupation of tending flocks and herds in the preſent times, is conſidered as mean, ſervile, and laborious; and is frequently attended with ſuch inconveniencies as produce a diſſatisfaction and diſguſt in the mind, with rude and uncouth manners. Accordingly, the loweſt part of a family is commonly appointed to this office, and with them it is rather an iron than a golden age. But in the earlier periods of the world, the generality of mankind made choice of a paſtoral life, as attended with eaſe, tranquillity, and contentment *; and then the maſters did not diſdain to cultivate a familiar and friendly intercourſe with their ſervants.

Thus the moderns, accommodating this kind of poetry to the preſent paſtoral life, have conſidered it as never riſing above the loweſt kind of the antients, and have made

* Et jam tum vita hominum ſine cupiditate agitabatur, ſua cuique ſatis placebant. SALLUST.

its chief characteriſtics to conſiſt in obſolete words, vulgar and proverbial phraſes, and ungrammatical language. Hence Virgil hath been cenſured by a celebrated critic * for not uſing the words *quoi*, *quoijam*, *volt*. But, beſides that the ſimplicity of compoſition doth not conſiſt in ruſticity of language, it is uncertain whether the loweſt peaſants in Virgil's time were acquainted with theſe words. Some of the moſt elegant Roman authors affected the uſe of antiquated phraſes, which they would not probably have done, had that phraſeology been in uſe among the loweſt plebeians of their own time, who are not ſuppoſed to be acquainted with the Archaiſms of language.

In the comedies of Plautus we meet with many words and phraſes which may appear to be ſuited to Latin paſtorals; and probably were ſo in the days of Plautus. That author died an hundred and nine years before

* Guardian, No. 40.

fore Virgil was born. So that the times in which theſe two poets flouriſhed, were diſtant about a century and an half; in which period the Roman language made ſo great advances in refinement, that it is probable even the peaſants of the Auguſtan age were ignorant of the vulgar words and phraſes of Plautus.

We ought further to conſider that, among the Romans, ſo far as we can know, the difference between the court ſtyle and that of peaſants, was not ſo great as with the moderns, particularly in Britain, where the courtier and the peaſant are frequently at a loſs to underſtand one another. Beſides, ſuch is the nature of the Latin language, that grammatical rules can ſcarcely ever be diſpenſed with, even in the loweſt kind of paſtoral. Whereas with us, ſuch accuracy in language hath not only been held unneceſſary in paſtoral compoſition, but deviations from the laws of grammar have been deemed characteriſtic of this ſort of poetry,

and

and chaſtity of language hath been declared an impropriety among cow-herds.

Some have thought the manner of Spencer, and even of Chaucer, proper for modern paſtoral. The periods in which theſe two authors lived, apologize ſufficiently for their ungrammatical phraſeology and obſolete language. It is the thoughts, not the manner of the bards of thoſe times, which claim our attention at preſent. Artleſs compoſition, plainneſs and ſimplicity of ſtyle are indiſpenſible in paſtoral; but it is not therefore neceſſary that this kind of compoſition be either ungrammatical, or burdened with obſolete words. If we deſcend to the vulgar words and vernacular phraſeology peculiar to any one county, our compoſitions will be found hardly intelligible in another; ſuch are the provincial differences of language in Britain, as well as in ſome other great kingdoms in Europe.

The well known relation between poetry and painting is ſuch, that they readily admit of mutual illuſtration. We can look at a landſcape exhibiting a ſhepherd on the ſide of a hill, with his flock and his dog, a cottage, with a few ſcraggy trees, a brook, and the like objects; but, though we allow the execution to be good, we ſoon tire of the poverty of this or the like ſcenery. We are conſcious of an effect wholly different when we examine the landſcapes of Pouſſin and Claud Loraine, in which, beſides a judicious diſpoſition of objects, we diſcover an enchanting richneſs and luxuriancy of nature. As ſome of theſe pieces are wholly rural, and partake little, if at all, of the heroic or ſublime, they can hardly fail to ſuggeſt ideas ſuited to paſtoral compoſition. We diſlike no leſs to ſee nature meanly dreſſed or clumſily delineated, than to hear her moſt delightful beauties deſcribed in low and vulgar language. A paſtoral poet ought to draw his images ſparingly from the works of art, which are generally of the

the meanneſt ſort in this kind of compoſition; or, if he avails himſelf of theſe, he will do well to enliven them from the works of nature. Mr Gay, in marking the riſing ſun, an object which commonly warms a poet's imagination, has it thus:

> But ſee the ſun-beams bright to labour warn,
> And gild the thatch of Goodman Hodge's barn.

In Virgil's deſcription of the evening, we have a landſcape at once in the ſimpleſt terms, and well ſuited to paſtoral.

> Et jam ſumma procul villarum culmina fumant;
> Majoreſque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae.

Though it would be improper to make ſhepherds, eſpecially thoſe of the lower ranks, ſpeak learnedly, the furniture of their minds being chiefly made up from the objects which immediately ſurround them; they may, nevertheleſs, occaſionally mention things which may appear beyond their ſphere, and which they may be ſuppoſed

ſuppoſed to have heard from others. A judicious poet will conduct this with propriety, making them mention ſuch ſubjects, not ſcientifically, but with uncertainty. Nor is it unnatural to ſuppoſe ſhepherds to have acquired an imperfect knowledge of many things conveyed to them by tradition from earlier times, or from diſtant countries. The two following lines from one of Virgil's loweſt paſtorals, have been often imitated, but never condemned.

In media duo ſigna Conon, et quis fuit alter
Deſcripſit radio totum qui gentibus orbem ?

LETTER XXI.

To Lælius.

RUSTICITY and meanneſs of language being held by ſome modern critics, particularly by one of known merit, indiſpenſible

indiſpenſible in paſtoral poetry, however well the ſentiments may be ſuited to the ſubject, Mr Pope's paſtorals have, from the purity of the language, been conſidered as having no claim to that kind of compoſition. But, the ſentiments in theſe poems being almoſt wholly taken from Theocritus and Virgil, this objection relating to ſtyle will inſenſibly become weaker, and at laſt entirely evaniſh, merely by length of time, provided language ſhall undergo the ſame viciſſitudes in the following as in the preceding ages; as we may ſuppoſe poems compoſed in Queen Elizabeth's days to have gradually become good paſtorals, from the language becoming obſolete and vulgar, though in thoſe times they had been denied the denomination of paſtorals, ſolely on account of their courtly ſtyle. Further, if there be a country in the world where the language and ſtyle of the courtier and the peaſant are the ſame, as was probably the caſe in Sparta, the language of that country

cannot

cannot admit of paſtoral compoſition, not affording a dialect for that purpoſe.

If, therefore, theſe four poems of Mr Pope, which he calls his Paſtorals, be reprobated on account of the purity and elegance of the language, as having no claim to that denomination, Virgil's ten Eclogues muſt ſhare the ſame fate. But both the one and the other, if we except a few paſſages, poſſeſs the artleſs ſimplicity which is held indiſpenſible in that kind of poetry, while they are free from the ruſticity and meanneſs deemed ſo requiſite by ſome critics. If Mr Pope be open to cenſure, I ſhould think it is in not attending to the degrees, or different kinds of paſtoral by which the Eclogues are ſo remarkably diverſified. This is one of the great excellencies of the Roman poet, each of the Eclogues being marked by a character diſtinct from the reſt, excepting perhaps the Tityrus and the Moeris, which have a greater ſimilarity than any other two. What Mr

Dryden hath obſerved with reſpect to Virgil's three works being diſtinguiſhable by the firſt line of each, may be applied to the Paſtorals alone. The firſt lines of the Tityrus, Palaemon, and Moeris, when compared with thoſe of the Pollio, Silenus, and Gallus, mark the former three to be of the loweſt, and the other of the higheſt kind. Thoſe of the intermediate kind being partly dramatical, and partly conſiſting of the poet's narrative, are no leſs diſtinguiſhable by their beginnings.

Mr Pope hath been ſo little attentive to diverſify his Paſtorals in this manner, or to diſtinguiſh them by particular characters, that, though the dramatical part of his Spring be almoſt wholly copied from the loweſt of the Eclogues, the opening of that Paſtoral is, nevertheleſs, an imitation of Virgil's beautiful addreſs to Varus at the beginning of his Silenus, one of the higheſt and fineſt of his Paſtorals. Though, therefore, Mr Pope's verſification in his Paſto-

rals be ſmooth, melodious, and happily ſuited to the ſentiments, there is ſtill a tireſome ſameneſs in his manner throughout theſe compoſitions, which might have been avoided, had not that ingenious poet copied ſo indiſcriminately from all Virgil's Eclogues. But, conſidering the early period of life in which Mr Pope compoſed theſe poems, he merits applauſe more than cenſure; and, that he did not avail himſelf of Virgil's variety, was owing to inattention, not to a want of poetical power, appears from his happy imitation of the Pollio in his Meſſiah.

To adapt language to different ſubjects, is known to be attended with difficulty, and to require taſte in proſe, but much more in poetical compoſitions. Hence we find poets of the middle and inferior ranks at one time turgid in deſcriptions of mean objects, at another inanimate and frigid, where the ſubject calls for warmth and elevation. Lucan is ſometimes open to this cenſure, Statius and Silius frequently.

If

If a poet attempt the different kinds of Paſtoral, he may find it difficult to conduct himſelf, ſo as not to riſe above the loweſt, or fall below the higheſt, when he is engaged in either; the middle kind requires no leſs attention. Beſides theſe three kinds, the elevations of ſtyle from the higheſt paſtoral to the moſt ſublime parts of the epic, admit of various degrees. The firſt verſe of Virgil's Paſtorals, of the Georgics, and of the Æneid, as hath been obſerved above, make a ſenſible climax, marking the nature of each of theſe compoſitions. But we ſhall judge better of the poet's powers, by attending to his method of treating the ſame thing in his three celebrated works, as the elder Scaliger hath obſerved. Thus a ſacrifice is expreſſed with great ſimplicity in the firſt Eclogue:

——————————Illius aram
Saepe tener noſtris ab ovilibus imbuet agnus.

In the admired opening to the third Georgic, a ſacrifice is mentioned with more dignity,

dignity, and in language too elevated for any kind of paſtoral.

Ipſe caput tonſae foliis ornatus olivae
Dona feram. Jam nunc ſolemnes ducere pompas
Ad delubra juvat, caeſoſque videre juvencos.

The third example, from the fourth Æneid, is bold, pompous, deſcriptive, and in every reſpect ſuited to epic compoſition.

Principio delubra adeunt, pacemque per aras
Exquirunt: Mactant lectos de more bidentis
Legiferae Cereri, Phoeboque, Patrique, Lyaeo:
Junoni ante omnis, cui vincla jugalia curae.
Ipſa tenens dextra pateram pulcherrima Dido,
Candentis vaccae media inter cornua fundit.
Aut ante ora diûm pinguis ſpatiatur ad aras,
Inſtauratque diem donis; pecudumque recluſis
Pectoribus inhians ſpirantia conſulit exta.

Upon the whole, Virgil hath not been excelled by any poet whatever in ſuiting his language to his ſubject; and this circumſtance proves, perhaps more than any other, the poetical powers, the taſte, and judgment

If a poet attempt the different kinds of Paſtoral, he may find it difficult to conduct himſelf, ſo as not to riſe above the loweſt, or fall below the higheſt, when he is engaged in either; the middle kind requires no leſs attention. Beſides theſe three kinds, the elevations of ſtyle from the higheſt paſtoral to the moſt ſublime parts of the epic, admit of various degrees. The firſt verſe of Virgil's Paſtorals, of the Georgics, and of the Æneid, as hath been obſerved above, make a ſenſible climax, marking the nature of each of theſe compoſitions. But we ſhall judge better of the poet's powers, by attending to his method of treating the ſame thing in his three celebrated works, as the elder Scaliger hath obſerved. Thus a ſacrifice is expreſſed with great ſimplicity in the firſt Eclogue:

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Exquirunt: Mactant lectos de more bidentis
Legiferae Cereri, Phoeboque, Patrique, Lyaeo:
Junoni ante omnis, cui vincla jugalia curae.
Ipſa tenens dextra pateram pulcherrima Dido,
Candentis vaccae media inter cornua fundit.
Aut ante ora diûm pinguis ſpatiatur ad aras,
Inſtauratque diem donis; pecudumque reclusis
Pectoribus inhians ſpirantia conſulit exta.

Upon the whole, Virgil hath not been excelled by any poet whatever in ſuiting his language to his ſubject; and this circumſtance proves, perhaps more than any other, the poetical powers, the taſte, and judgment

judgment of that poet. It may be here obſerved, with reſpect to paſtoral ſtyle, that Theocritus had the advantage of Virgil, and perhaps of all the modern authors of paſtoral, ſince he wrote in a language which afforded a grammatical dialect ſuited to his ſubject.

In conſequence of theſe obſervations on paſtoral compoſition, we may conclude, that, if a poet confine himſelf to modern paſtoral, as Philips and Gay, he ought not to riſe above the loweſt degree of antient paſtoral; and let his ſtyle, if he chooſe, be the Doric of our modern ſhepherds, that is, mean, proverbial, and hardly grammatical. But if he invoke or introduce the Greek and Roman deities, and adopt their mythology, then, conſidering himſelf as carried back to antient times, and tranſlated to Arcadian or Sicilian plains, he may indulge his muſe in a greater latitude, and, though he ſing in more elevated ſtrains, he will not lay himſelf open to a charge of impropriety.

As

As a termination to this ſubject, my next letter ſhall contain a few critical obſervations relating to Virgil's Eclogues, which I have found of ſo great uſe in illuſtrating theſe thoughts.

LETTER XXII.

To Lælius.

AS a beginning to theſe critical obſervations, I ſhall attempt a vindication of Donatus, in a circumſtance which he mentions concerning the ſixth Eclogue. This author, in his life of Virgil, ſays, that, when ſome verſes of that paſtoral were rehearſed from the theatre by Cytheris, Cicero was ſo much pleaſed with them, that he wiſhed afterwards to hear the whole; and that, having heard them, he called out, "*Magnae ſpes altera Romae.*" The commentators

mentators and critics have generally condemned this as a flagrant Anachroniſm, particularly Peter Ramus, Vavaſſeuer, du Verdier, and Bail. Mr Dryden ſeems to have intentionally avoided an examination of any thing relating to the chronology of Virgil's life.

The four authors juſt mentioned obſerve, that the firſt Paſtoral was not compoſed till after the diviſion of the lands about Mantua and Cremona, when Auguſtus gave them to his veterans, which was about five years after Cicero's death.

To conſider this matter properly, it muſt be obſerved, that Virgil was born in the year of Rome 683, and died in 734 or 735. Some make both his birth and his death one year later, which, in the preſent inquiry, is of little importance. Cicero was put to death in the year of Rome 711. Virgil, therefore, at Cicero's death, was twenty-eight years of age, and, at the diviſion

viſion of the lands about Mantua thirty-three or thirty-four.

The criticiſm relating to Donatus would be a juſt one, could it be aſcertained that the Tityrus was the Eclogue firſt compoſed; but it can hardly be believed that a mind ſo well informed, and a genius ſo refined as that of Virgil, would remain inactive till thirty-four, or even till twenty-eight years of age; nor is it probable that the Tityrus was Virgil's firſt compoſition. That it was placed firſt by Virgil himſelf, is obvious from the two laſt verſes of the fourth Georgic, and from ſome paſſages of contemporary authors. But, further, the ſixth Eclogue hath much the appearance of having been Virgil's firſt paſtoral compoſition. Whoever reads the twelve verſes which make the opening to it, can ſcarcely doubt of the truth of this obſervation. Beſides, the ſubject of this Eclogue having occupied Virgil's mind during his juvenile ſtudies, had probably then, or ſoon there-

after, been digeſted into the order in which they now ſtand; for theſe mythological fables were commonly taught in their ſchools, and were ſometimes made ſubjects of declamation.

Had not Virgil compoſed any of his paſtorals till the expulſion of the Mantuan peaſants, that is, till thirty-three or thirty-four years of age, he could hardly have ſaid with propriety,

> Carmina qui luſi paſtorum *audaxque*
> *Juventa*, &c.

That the Tityrus, though not the firſt paſtoral compoſition, ſhould, nevertheleſs, have the firſt place, is not ſurpriſing, when we conſider the important occaſion on which it was written, and likewiſe, that it contains the praiſes of Auguſtus; nor doth there appear any good reaſon why Donatus and Servius ſhould have mentioned the ſixth Eclogue, as having been known to Cicero

Cicero preferable to any other, the compoſition of which may be ſuppoſed to have preceded his death, had not theſe two authors been ſupported by ſome good authority. Upon the whole, when theſe circumſtances are compared together, it appears no way improbable that Cicero had heard this paſtoral, and likewiſe, conſidering the vanity to which this great man was naturally ſubject, that he uttered the expreſſion aſcribed to him, which Virgil afterwards inſerted in the Æneid.

Servius, in his note upon *Nos patriae fines*, &c. Eclogue 1ſt, hath fallen into an anachroniſm, which ſeems to have eſcaped the animadverſion of the commentators. He would make the diſtribution of the Mantuan lands among Auguſtus's ſoldiers not to have happened till after Antony's defeat at Actium *. This battle was fought in the year of Rome 721 or 722, at which time Virgil

* Non voluntate ſed vi Caeſaris et militum ejus compulſi, victo Antonio.

Virgil was thirty-eight or thirty-nine years of age, a period in which Servius ſays, in another place, he had finiſhed both his paſtorals and Georgics.

It may be alledged, that, by *victo Antonio*, Servius may mean the battle of Mutina, where Antony ſuffered a defeat. But this cannot be, ſince Auguſtus did not reward his veterans till after the battle of Philippi, which was four or five years poſterior to that of Mutina; and in the battle of Philippi the ſoldiers were more properly Antony's than Caeſar's, the honour of that victory being chiefly aſcribed to Antony. This Servius himſelf allows in his note upon *Impius Miles*, where he ſays, *qui pro Antonio arma portavit*.

The commentators have been embarraſſed in endeavouring to explain who and how many were thoſe known by the name of Varus or Varius, for whom Horace and Virgil expreſs ſo great eſteem and affection.

Some,

Some, without regard to the order of time, ſeek no farther than Quintilius Varus, who, with his legions, was killed in Germany, or Varius the epic poet. Catullus, in his tenth epigram, mentions one Varus, whom Muretus, notwithſtanding his uſual accuracy, would make this Quintilius. The diſaſter of Quintilius did not happen till the year of Rome 762. So that, conſidering the diſtance of time, if theſe two, being of the ſame family, were likewiſe in the ſame line of deſcent, Quintilius might have been grandſon of the other, or, perhaps, a degree further removed. There were ſo many eminent men of the Varian family in the time of Auguſtus, that it becomes difficult, perhaps impoſſible, to determine which of them it was whom Virgil mentions with ſo much applauſe in his ſixth Eclogue. It is abundantly evident, that Virgil cannot mean the Varus killed in Germany, ſince that event happened upwards of fifty years after the compoſition of this paſtoral, and nearly thirty years after

ter Virgil's death. Now, as the Varus, celebrated by Virgil had diſtinguiſhed himſelf in the military line, before the writing of that paſtoral, he may be ſuppoſed, at that time, thirty years of age, or upwards, and, conſequently, between eighty and ninety when the maſſacre in Germany happened. It is not a little ſurpriſing, that both C. Stephanus and Mr Ainſworth have fallen into the ſame miſtake with Muretus, in their hiſtorical dictionaries, in ſuppoſing either the Varus of Catullus or of Virgil to have lived to ſo late a period.

Others have made the Varus, who was originally a cobler in Cremona, and afterwards a noted Civilian, the patron of Virgil. But a moderate attention to chronology will diſcover this to be a falſe notion; for this Varus was elected conſul in the year of Rome 754, that is, about twenty years after Virgil's death. A man, therefore, of an extract ſo low, and who had been in a line of life ſo mean, cannot be ſuppoſed to have

have had it in his power to patroniſe Virgil ſo early as 711. Nor is it probable, that Varus the Civilian ever appeared in arms, or diſtinguiſhed himſelf in that way. It is ſtill leſs probable that Attius Varus, who was deeply engaged with the Pompeian faction, could be Virgil's patron, as ſome have alledged; for this Varus, having had a conſiderable command in Africa, paſſed over into Spain, and was killed at the battle of Munda, which happened at leaſt three years earlier than the compoſition of the ſixth Eclogue.

There are ſtill two of the name of Varus, one of whom was probably Virgil's patron, who is celebrated in this paſtoral. The one is Quintilius Varus, taken by Caeſar in Corfinium at the beginning of the civil war, was a warm friend to the republican cauſe, and ſealed it with his blood after the battle of Philippi; the other is that Varus who got the command of the provinces beyond the Po, had the direction of the partition

tition of the Mantuan lands, and is ſaid to have been inſtrumental in ſaving Virgil's farm. Some have given the *praenomen* of Alphenus or Alfenus, others of Quintilius, to this Varus, which hath proved the cauſe of confuſion and uncertainty. There is little room to doubt that the Varus mentioned in the ninth Eclogue is the epic poet.

LETTER XXIII.

To Hortensia.

TRUSTING that you have not read du Bos, du Pile, and others who have treated the art of painting, without profiting from theſe volumes, I ſhall communicate a few thoughts on that ſubject, which naturally follows the art of poetry. Painting is not to be acquired, as is well known, without long labour, and cloſe attention.

But

But the acquiſition of a taſte in this art, independent of the manual execution, is not attended with ſo great difficulty as many who have written on this ſubject would perſuade us. In reading hiſtory, eſpecially ſuch paſſages as are intereſting, and artfully compoſed, we are conſcious of an ideal ſcenery paſſing in the mind. This picture, whether it exiſt only in the ſenſory, or be committed to canvaſs, is really what is termed compoſition in painting; nor can an artiſt make any piece of ſcenery his own by the pencil, till he hath firſt digeſted it in his mind.

One poſſeſſed of a regular and lively imagination will, in the courſe of reading paſſages ſuited to painters, inſenſibly conceive as juſt an arrangement of the different parts as is to be met with in the compoſitions of the beſt artiſts, and ſuperior to that of many of the great maſters who have excelled in the other branches, but have been leſs happy in this. If, there-

fore, one, whether in reading or in hearing relations of remarkable actions, would habituate himſelf to conſider how theſe ought to be repreſented in painting, that perſon would become a judge of the propriety of invention and of diſpoſition, which together make compoſition in painting. Let the following example illuſtrate theſe obſervations.

Plutarch tells us, in the life of Marius, that, when that General was upwards of ſeventy years of age, being forced by Sylla's party to abandon Italy, he expected to find an aſylum in Africa. He had no ſooner landed there, than a meſſenger from Sextilius, the Pretor, acquainted him that he muſt immediately leave Africa, or that the Pretor would be obliged to put the ſentence of the Senate in execution. Marius continued ſome time penſive and unmoved, when the meſſenger urging an anſwer, "Go tell Sextilius," ſaid he, "you ſaw "Caius Marius ſitting on the ruins of "Carthage."

"Carthage." It was not poſſible to give an anſwer in ſo few words more expreſſive of the viciſſitude of human affairs. This ſaying of Marius being an indication of the ſtate of his mind, a good artiſt will know how to avail himſelf of it in expreſſing his features. Let one, having read this paſſage, throw down the book, and conſider with himſelf how he would commit it to canvaſs. The leading figure is an aged General, who, after having ſaved his country from ruin, when the danger was ſo great that he was deemed the only citizen fit to command her armies, is reduced to extreme miſery, and deſerted by almoſt every friend. To delineate a figure, repreſenting Marius in theſe circumſtances, and ſtill retaining an invincible greatneſs of mind, and a ferocity of features peculiar to himſelf, would require the hand of an uncommon artiſt. The other figures ought to be few, their eyes directed towards Marius, and their attitudes expreſſive of their wearied and dejected ſtate. The manner in

which

which the meſſenger receives his anſwer ought likewiſe to be attended to, and the whole figures properly aggrouped. The ruins of a city, formerly celebrated for arts and power, would communicate to the piece a ſolemn dignity, productive of affecting emotions in a mind of taſte and ſenſibility. One who reads this paſſage in Plutarch with any degree of attention, will be ſtruck with this ſcenery, or with ſomething ſimilar to it.

Of all the arts, there are none in which Nature, as a ſchool-miſtreſs, ought to be more ſollicitouſly followed than in that of painting. We cannot open our eyes, or look upon objects, which may not be conſidered as having no projection, but only exiſting on a flat ſurface, as is actually the caſe with their images on the retina of the eye. But, as figures on plain ſurfaces cannot, of themſelves, throw ſhadows, it becomes a matter of importance to painters to underſtand the proper direction of light.

When

When we ſit in a room, into which light is admitted only from one ſide; and if a company be arranged there in a circular order, we will, by repeated obſervation, and a moderate degree of attention, learn on whom the light falls, ſo as to appear to the greateſt advantage when taken off on canvaſs.

When a painter draws a landſcape, or any group of objects in the open air, he hath a command of light and ſhade, by introducing clouds, trees, or whatever he ſhall judge moſt conducive to ſhow his leading figures in the moſt favourable light. It may not be unſeaſonable to obſerve here, that hiſtorical, as well as poetical compoſitions, have a relation with that in painting, though the former in a leſs degree than the other. Salluſt gives us an elegant account of the ſimple and frugal manners of the Romans in the earlier periods of the republic, before entering upon Cataline's conſpiracy. Some of the commentators have

cenſured

cenſured this, as an ill-timed digreſſion. It is the ſame as if a painter ſhould, by a judicious direction of light, ſo illuminate the back ground of his field, as to exhibit his larger figures to the greateſt advantage. The hiſtorian could not have thought of a more proper method to ſet the luxury and licentiouſneſs of his own times in a ſtriking point of view, or to render the diſſolute and flagitious manners of ſome of the firſt citizens of Rome odious.

The preceding is not the only circumſtance in which hiſtory coincides with painting. It hath been juſtly obſerved, that, in the latter, the outlines, artfully delineated, contain all the expreſſion that can be conveyed, the ſhading ſerving only to diſengage the figures from the canvaſs. In like manner, characters of diſtinguiſhed perſonages may be delineated with great juſtneſs by artful, though ſhort ſketches of their moſt remarkable actions. No hiſtorian hath given better ſpecimens of this kind

kind than Cornelius Nepos, of whoſe lives you have ſeen a good tranſlation. As the outlines, in the former caſe, facilitate the ſhading to the painter, ſo hiſtorical ſketches, ingeniouſly compoſed, prove a convenient and uſeful plan for a more complete hiſtory. Both the one and the other correſpond to what Horace recommends in his Art of Poetry, as of ſingular utility, to authors of epic and dramatical compoſitions, and will be found equally productive of perſpicuity and regularity.

To him who ſhall his theme with judgment chooſe,
Nor words, nor method ſhall their aid refuſe.
In this, or I miſtake, conſiſts the grace,
And force of method to aſſign a place
For what with preſent judgment we ſhould ſay,
And for ſome happier time the reſt delay.

LETTER

LETTER XXIV.

To Hortensia.

IN a letter to Laelius, I obſerved, that, among the authors who have aſſumed the department of paſtoral, few have been able to ſupport poetical dignity, without departing from paſtoral ſimplicity; and, in general, it ſeems difficult to preſerve the one, without a ſacrifice of the other. Virgil in his Eclogues, of which you may judge from Mr Dryden's and other tranſlations, never ſinks from the dignity of the poet, while his deſcriptions are purely paſtoral. I mean not here to enter into the controverſy whether theſe Eclogues merit the denomination of Paſtorals. It ſufficeth, that in them we meet with much rural ſcenery, which, though elegant, is poſſeſſed of that natural

natural ſimplicity which is indiſpenſible in paſtoral compoſition.

Theſe obſervations are applicable to painting. Some artiſts, particularly of the Flemiſh ſchool, have affected to repreſent nature in a mean dreſs. Sordid cottages, rivulets, with ſhattered bridges, wearied travellers, a few ſcraggy trees, and the like, make up the leading objects of their landſcapes. Theſe we look at, allow the execution to be good; but hardly wiſh any more to ſee nature in ſuch a ſtate of poverty. Claud Lorrain, Gaſper Pouſſin, and a few others, are to thoſe painters what Virgil is to the authors of paſtoral, who repreſent cow-herds telling their loves in the coarſeſt and moſt vulgar language, calling in images and figures from their cattle, or objects immediately about them, ſometimes hardly decent; becauſe we are told they are pure nature. Theſe authors plead the authority of Theocritus, the father of paſtoral poetry among the Greeks.

It hath been an opinion that ſimplicity is inconſiſtent with the ſublime. But this is a miſtake. No artiſt ever had an higher or more delicate taſte for the antique and ſublime in painting, than Gaſper Pouſſin. Even in thoſe of his landſcapes, in which no mark of human art appears, every thing, though ſimple, is grand. In his view of Sicily, he ſhews nature artleſs and in all her ſimplicity; but, at the ſame time, in a rich, luxuriant, and magnificent ſtate; and he hath there availed himſelf of ſuch antient fables as ſuited his paſtoral ſubject; theſe making the machinery of the painter as well as of the poet. We can hardly look upon this bewitching piece of ſcenery without thinking on Virgil's Sicilian Muſes *, his richeſt rural deſcriptions, or, as he terms it, the divine glories of the country. Upon the whole, we may conclude, that ſimplicity and dignity are circumſtances, which, when joined together, are perhaps of greater importance than any other, both to the pencil and the pen.

Expreſſion

* Eclogue iv.

Expreſſion is a branch which proves a touchſtone both to the art and the taſte of a painter. Of two or more artiſts, he who brings out the ſame paſſion of the mind with equal or greater advantage, but with the leaſt muſcular diſtortion, is ſo far ſuperior to the reſt. This was one of Raphael's great excellencies; we ſee many of his figures, in the countenances of which the paſſion intended is fully expreſſed, with little or no muſcular exertion. The longer we look at theſe, the expreſſion ſtrikes us the more, and at length they ſeem as if about to ſpeak to us. An artiſt inferior in this branch, is commonly obliged to have recourſe to diſtortions of the countenance. The caſe here is ſimilar to that of a comedian, who, being unqualified to command the paſſions of his audience by language alone, is under the neceſſity of calling in the agitations of his body.

It hath been obſerved by ſome late authors, that the painters of the two laſt centuries,

turies, from too great an attachment to ſacred hiſtory, were frequently unhappy in the choice of their ſubjects. They obſerve further, that the twelve Apoſtles muſt ever make a bad ſubject for painters. But it is to be ſuſpected that this animadverſion proceeds from an unfavourable prepoſſeſſion. When any particular action attracts the attention, or excites a paſſion in a number of ſpectators, the art of the painter manifeſts itſelf in bringing out that particular paſſion, under a variety of features, in the different ſpectators; for he would be a miſerable artiſt who could not expreſs the ſame paſſion, but conſtantly by the ſame ſet of features. When Mutius Scaevola thruſt his hand into the fire before Porſenna, this King and all his attendants were ſtruck with extreme aſtoniſhment in ſeeing the intrepidity of that hero, and an action ſo deſperate. This ſtate of the mind, in all theſe ſpectators, though the ſame, is to be variouſly expreſſed. This obſervation may be applied to Regulus with his ſorrowful friends

friends about him, when, in order to ſave his honour by the ſacrifice of his life, he was about to return to Carthage. The Apoſtles, though their number had amounted to more than twelve, if ſo affected with ſome extraordinary action as to excite a particular paſſion, would make as proper a ſubject for painters as that of Scaevola, Regulus, or numberleſs others that might be inſtanced. Raphael's death of Annanias, and Chriſt's charge to Peter, are proofs of this obſervation. Leonardo da Vinci's laſt ſupper, in the great church of Milan, hath always been eſteemed one of the moſt exquiſite pieces to be met with. In this we ſee ſurpriſe, affection, admiration, anxiety, doubt, and treachery, expreſſed in the faces of the Apoſtles, without muſcular diſtortion. This piece hath been greatly admired by the moſt refined judges; but is not of that kind which attracts the attention of ordinary ſpectators, who are more pleaſed with much muſcular exertion. Violent expreſſion, unleſs it be indiſpenſible, is no proof

proof of a refined taſte in the artiſt. One of the greateſt beauties in painting is expreſſion, when attended with ſimplicity. We may judge of this, by comparing the portraits of Holben and Vandyke with many of a later date, in which ſtaring countenances, and a formality of attitude, indicate want of freedom, and the laborious execution of the painter.

When a painter's chief excellency lies in deſign, he would be blameable if he did not chooſe ſubjects which diſcover the muſcles in action, and the figures in various attitudes, as in battle pieces. But thoſe of a more delicate taſte, and whoſe art lies chiefly in compoſition and expreſſion, prefer pieces in which they find opportunities of bringing out the paſſions, ſtill retaining a ſimplicity of features. Sacred hiſtory abounds with ſubjects of this kind; and, when judiciouſly ſelected, are well ſuited to thoſe maſters, who, without having recourſe to muſcular diſtortions, are able to expreſs

expreſs the ſtate of the mind in the features. It is for a ſimilar reaſon that the beſt qualified comedians exhibit their art to the greateſt advantage, in characters in which the paſſions are artfully, but not violently marked. Hence the capital characters in Shakeſpeare's tragedies become the ſevereſt trial of theatrical art; for, as an accompliſhed painter is able to bring out much expreſſion by a ſingle ſtroke of the pencil; ſo Shakeſpeare frequently exhibits the paſſions of the mind in a ſentence or two, the proper delivery of which from a theatre, requires particular art and judgment. When Lear becomes the ſport of the elements, he utters many expreſſions in his phrenſy, which, when pronounced by a comedian, artleſs and void of taſte, may tend to provoke laughter; but, by one well qualified and equal to the taſk, can hardly fail to draw tears from the audience.

Having mentioned Theocritus, I ſhall finiſh this letter with an anecdote concern-

ing

ing that poet, which, though not tending to illuſtrate the preceding ſubject, I preſume may be to your liking. The commentators have found ſome paſſages in the Paſtorals of Theocritus ſo ſimilar to the ſtyle and figures of the Song of Solomon, that they have been led to conclude the Greek poet to have copied from that eaſtern compoſition. Solomon married the daughter of the King of Egypt, and might have conveyed his marriage paſtoral to his father-in-law. But that Theocritus, though at Alexandria, ſhould ſee it at the diſtance of ſeven hundred years from its compoſition, is not very probable. The probability, however, riſes higher, when we conſider, that the Greek poet, as hiſtory informs us, was at Alexandria with ſome other men of genius and literature, in the reign of Ptolomy Philadelphus; that the verſion of the Moſaic law, and of the other Jewiſh compilations, was then in the hands of the tranſlators in that city; that every man of taſte, of letters, and of curioſity, would be led to look

into

into theſe tranſlations, as they were carried on; and, laſtly, that Theocritus would naturally incline to examine ſuch parts of them as related chiefly to his own compoſitions. Theſe conjectures are the more likely, that the paſtoral in praiſe of Ptolomy Philadelphus is immediately followed by one which hath been obſerved to have a remarkable affinity to the Hebrew paſtoral; and further, if this poet took his hints from Solomon's poem, he could not have choſen a ſubject better ſuited to his purpoſe than the nuptials of Menelaus and Helen.

LETTER XXV.

To Lælius.

WHETHER poetry or painting hath a greater influence in moving the paſſions, is a problem which hath been long agitated, and remains ſtill unreſolved. The poet hath here an evident advantage, to which the other cannot lay claim; ſince he is able to convey to his readers, not only his own deſcriptions, but the converſations and dialogues of his actors. The only language of the painter is the pencil. Homer's account of Hector's laſt interview with Andromachy hath met with univerſal applauſe. There is a capital painting of it, if I miſtake not, by Guido. That maſter hath availed himſelf of every circumſtance which he could introduce, conſiſtent with the laws of his art. The child,

afraid

afraid of the helmet, clings to his mother's boſom. The hero removes the helmet, looking on Andromachy and his ſon with ſtrong marks of tenderneſs and affection, while ſhe diſcovers, in every feature of her countenance, extreme ſolicitude for the fate of her huſband. The painter could do no more. The affecting converſation which paſſed in this interview, belongs wholly to the poet. If this dialogue be out of the queſtion, it is hard to ſay whether the poet or the painter have greater merit; and judges will decide as their taſte in poetry or in painting, or their attachment to eitheir of theſe arts, prevails.

Painters, when compared with poets, labour under another inconvenience: That is, they cannot admit into a piece of painting more than one part of a ſcene of action; whereas the poet traces the action circumſtantially from the beginning to the end. When we ſpeak of the death of Hector, as deſcribed by Homer, we underſtand

ſtand that varied ſcenery which paſſed under the wall of Troy, relating to the death of that hero. But a painter muſt chooſe that part of it which he thinks will beſt ſuit his purpoſe, or be moſt affecting to ſpectators; a circumſtance in which artiſts themſelves, though of good taſte, do not always agree.

In this queſtion concerning the powers of poetry and of painting, ſome authors* would make Horace to have given a deciſion in favour of the latter. This conjecture is drawn from a well known paſſage in the Art of Poetry.

> Segnius irritant animos demiſſa per aurem,
> Quam quae ſunt oculis ſubjecta fidelibus, et quae
> Ipſe ſibi tradit ſpectator.

But it is abundantly obvious, that nothing more is meant in this paſſage than that a part, perhaps a death, repreſented on the theatre, is more ſtriking to the ſpectators

* Abbè du Bos, &c.

tators than if it had been conveyed by narration alone.

The harmony of the various branches of the fine arts, and of polite literature with one another, is a curious ſubject of inveſtigation, and would require an ample diſcuſſion. A painter of a refined taſte, and accompliſhed in his art, is able to bring out much expreſſion with a few ſtrokes of the pencil, and theſe having ſo much the appearance of eaſe, that we are apt to imagine we could have, without difficulty, done the ſame ourſelves. But great powers in execution muſt be ſuppoſed to be the reſult of tedious labour in the art of deſign, after which taſte becomes the directreſs. Of the two departments juſt mentioned, as no branch can be acquired without labour and exertion, whether of the hand or of the mind, it becomes the buſineſs of taſte to conceal that labour, and to communicate an appearance of eaſe.

When

When we read the works of Virgil and of Horace, we are ſo far from diſcovering difficulty or labour, that their firſt thoughts ſeem to have been immediately committed to writing, and never afterwards changed. It is, however, certain, that Virgil ſpent ſeveral years in poliſhing the Æneid; and it perhaps coſt him his life at laſt; nor would Horace have adviſed others to keep their compoſitions under correction for many years before committing them to the public, had not he himſelf followed the plan he recommends. An elegant eaſe and unaffected careleſſneſs conſtitute the beauty of epiſtolary compoſition, whether in verſe or proſe; in the former of which none have excelled this celebrated poet. Lucan, we are told, compoſed with rapidity. The Pharſalia, in conſequence of this, carries along with it an air of labour and difficulty; the periods are long, ſometimes perplexed, and the poet is frequently loſt in the Rhetorician. Upon the whole, the artiſt or author labours to little purpoſe, if he doth not know how to conceal his labour; for

eaſe,

eaſe, and an air of negligence, are what conſtitute elegance in operations, whether of the hand or of the mind; and in none more than in thoſe of the fine arts and polite literature.

It may be obſerved here, that the more difficult labours of the painter are thoſe which are preparatory to his buſineſs; but the labours of the author, and particularly of the poet, conſtantly attend him while he is engaged either in compoſing or in poliſhing. A painter, having once made himſelf maſter of deſign, if he be poſſeſſed of a refined taſte, will find the two branches, compoſition and expreſſion, an agreeable entertainment to himſelf. This ſeems to have been the caſe with ſome of the great maſters, from the number of paintings they have left us; for, had they not been able to delineate readily from their own ideas, without ſervilely copying from other delineations, and particularly to throw animal bodies into what attitudes they thought proper,

proper, they could neither have finiſhed their pieces ſo quickly, nor could they have diſcovered that eaſe of execution, ſtrength of expreſſion, and regularity of compoſition, which commonly ſtrike us upon firſt ſeeing them.

Were a painter, having finiſhed the neceſſary figures in an hiſtory piece, to leave the reſt of the canvas void, we would condemn him for want of taſte. Analogous to this would be an epic poem, in which we ſhould find the great incidents arranged, but left unconnected: In the former caſe, the artiſt would ſtill be open to cenſure, were he to load his canvas either with a multiplicity of minute figures, having little or no relation to the intention of the piece, or with objects of an oppoſite kind, ſo large and ſtriking as to divert the eye of the ſpectator from his hiſtorical figures. In like manner, an epic poet would err, were he to dwell too long upon the connecting parts, or to attempt to ſwell theſe to the ſublime,

ſublime, ſo as to divert the mind of his reader from the importance of the incidents themſelves. Statius is a poet of this kind. We find him, even while he relates trifling circumſtances, making efforts to reach the clouds.

The art of ſinking in poetry hath been ſatirized, as is well known, with humour and ridicule. But, to ſink with judgment and taſte, belongs only to poets of the firſt rank. We view a range of mountains with greater advantage from the adjacent valleys than if we were conſtantly on the tops of theſe mountains. As no poet hath reached the greateſt heights of the ſublime more happily than Homer, ſo none have conducted themſelves more judiciouſly, when it was neceſſary to deſcend to narrations merely hiſtorical. Virgil proceeds with a more uniform dignity, neither riſing ſo high, nor falling ſo low, as Homer, his powers lying more in exquiſite verſification than in poetical invention. Among ſome of his

moſt melodious verſes, and of the higheſt poliſh, we ſometimes meet with what may be called a Proſaic line; which, though it be exactly agreeable to the laws of proſody, is, in reading, ſomewhat like proſe, and hath the beſt effects in ſetting off the neighbouring verſes. Among many examples which might be produced, let the following ſuffice.

Hic manus ob patriam pugnando vulnera paſſi,
Quique ſacerdotes caſti, dum vita manebat,
Quique pii vates, et Phoebo digna locuti,
Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artes,
Quique ſui memores alios fecere merendo.

LETTER XXVI.

To Lælius.

WE ſee maſters and ſcholars univerſally engaged in teaching and in learning. But, to convey knowledge in ſuch a manner as to impreſs the mind of the learner with a taſte for the branch taught, is a matter of no leſs difficulty than importance. It is not uncommon for the youth of both ſexes to beſtow ſome time on drawing and deſign, as a part of education. This, as well as muſic, the French and Italian languages, is often taught, but ſeldom learned. Were the maſters who teach deſign provided with a proper aſſortment of engravings, copied from the beſt paintings of the Flemiſh, French, and Italian ſchools, it would be of utility to their ſcholars to point out from theſe copies the manner

manner of the different ſchools, and of their reſpective maſters. Thus might the youth have their taſte ſo far improved, as to be able to judge with propriety of deſign, compoſition, and expreſſion, and to diſtinguiſh in which of theſe branches the moſt celebrated painters have excelled.

The art of painting is known to have declined for above a century paſt; nor doth it appear that cauſes, ſufficiently ſatisfactory, have been aſſigned for this decline. The taſte in painting, it is to be feared, will naturally follow the degeneracy of the art. We have been told that the arts, having reached a certain height, cannot remain there; but, from a reſtleſſneſs natural to man, fall into diſcredit, and give way to other purſuits. This, however, will hardly be admitted as a ſolid reaſon, by a mind diſpoſed to trace cauſes and effects to their ſources.

About the time in which the family of the Medicis reſtored the ſciences in Italy, the

the art of painting came to be ſtudied and cultivated with attention. Artiſts then having few examples to copy after, thought for themſelves. This exertion of the mind was productive of the beſt effects; for, when the Lombard, Roman, and Venetian ſchools were eſtabliſhed, there aroſe an emulation among them to excel one another. The ſame paſſion prevailed among the maſters of each ſchool; being ſolicitous to excel, they deſpiſed copying from the works of others. Thus Italy ſoon came to be ſtored with excellent paintings, as ſome of the more northern parts of Europe were ſome time thereafter from the French and Flemiſh ſchools.

In the great ſchools many poor boys were occupied in preparing colours and the like inferior departments. As no art is more attracting to children than painting, theſe boys naturally imitated their maſters; and extraordinary talents ſometimes appeared where they were leaſt expected.

Thus

Thus ſome of the painters came in time to acquire fortune and fame by an accidental education in this art, without which they probably would have paſſed their lives in obſcurity, perhaps in ſervitude or beggary; and, as the great ſchools were not, for a conſiderable length of time, without one or more capital maſters, a good genius was never loſt for want of the beſt examples. In thoſe times it was cuſtomary to paint on the walls and ceilings of churches and great houſes, by which the artiſts acquired a freedom of hand and boldneſs in execution, to which one labouring conſtantly at the iſlel, or in ſmaller figures, can never hope to attain.

The human mind, as well as the body, when it finds a ſupport, or is not ſtimulated to action, is apt to contract an indolence. The painters of later times having ſo many original pieces, which ſerve as ſtandards for all the branches of the art, whether from a deſpair of coming up to the excel-

lence

lence of theſe, or from a reluctance to exertion, have become rather imitators than original painters. The demand for portraits hath proved a detriment to the art in general; for painters, when they are able to catch a likeneſs, finding that they can thus ſubſiſt, or perhaps pick up ſome fortune, devote themſelves wholly to that ſervile occupation, and remain all their lives unqualified for the great branches of their art.

One may be poſſeſſed of a general taſte for painting, and yet be unable to diſtinguiſh what ſubjects are beſt ſuited to this art. Many of the painters of high character were unhappy in the choice of their ſubjects. This hath been aſcribed by ſome to the attachment which the painters of the three laſt centuries had to ſacred hiſtory, as I have obſerved to Hortenſia. It is true ſome of the more eminent maſters devoted themſelves ſolely to ſacred hiſtory. But others no leſs eminent are known to have made

made choice of improper ſubjects from the Greek and Roman, as well as from the Jewiſh hiſtory. Beſides, the ſubjects in both are frequently found to be ſo ſimilar, that it doth not greatly matter from which of the two painters make their ſelections. Alexander, in the deſerts of Lybia, refuſing to drink the water which a ſoldier brought in his helmet, is not a better ſubject than David, making a libation of the water which his officers had procured at the danger of their lives; nor is Agamemnon and Iphigenia preferable to Jephtha and his daughter.

An ingenious author, and an undoubted good judge of painting, conſiders the ſtory of St Andrew falling down before the croſs, to which he was ſoon afterwards to be fixed, as a ſubject for painting, much inferior to that of Iphigenia. It is an eaſy matter to contraſt a good ſubject with a bad one. There is hardly an hiſtory in which both kinds are not to be found. It was unne-

ceſſary

ceſſary for the author to introduce the ſtory of St Andrew, when that of Jephtha, ſo much a-kin to the ſacrifice of Iphigenia, naturally preſented itſelf. This is not the only example that might be brought to ſhew a predilection for the Greek and Roman hiſtories, which this author, as well as ſome others, have conſidered as almoſt the only ſources of ſubjects fit for painters.

It is true, the deities and fabulous hiſtories of Greece and Rome, furniſh a great variety of excellent ſubjects for this art; and ſome of the painters have treated it with judgment and ſucceſs, while others, though of good character, ſeem to have been unequal to this kind of compoſition, eſpecially where allegory was intended. To introduce theſe deities into modern hiſtory is prepoſterous, and inconſiſtent with the chaſtity of taſte. Rubens hath been juſtly cenſured for repreſenting the Tritons ſounding their ſhells in honour of the arrival of Mary de Medicis at Marſeilles.

It is not meant, however, that theſe deities ſhould be excluded from the poetical fables of the moderns, whether as a ground-work, or as machinery.

I have obſerved further, that thoſe of a leſs refined taſte, wiſh to ſee the body in action, and the paſſions expreſſed by diſtorted muſcles. In Raphael's death of Annanias, the figure at the feet of the dying man, reſting on his knee, ſtarting backwards, with diſtorted features, expreſſive of great horror, attracts the attention of the greater part of ſpectators. Raphael judged well in contraſting his other figures with one of this kind; but that maſter's art and judgment will appear to thoſe of a more refined taſte, chiefly in the countenances of the Apoſtles, which, though variouſly marked, diſcover a conviction of the criminal's guilt, and of the juſtneſs of his puniſhment.

In ſtudying compoſition in painting, one cannot fail to diſcover its coincidence with

that of poetry. Accordingly, poets of all denominations have their correſponding painters. In the battles of Le Brun, we ſee no leſs richneſs of invention, and propriety of taſte, in his varied attitudes, and in the expreſſion of his paſſions, than in the battles of Homer. Had Theocritus and Virgil ſeen the landſcapes of Gaſper Pouſſin, even theſe celebrated poets might have profited, from the rural and paſtoral ſcenery of theſe exquiſite pieces of art; and we ſee the genius of Ovid in the loves of Albano. We may entertain, and in ſome degree improve our minds, by claſſing the more celebrated authors in poetry with the maſters in painting, according to their relations in the two arts, as into the gay, the grave, the ſublime, the majeſtic, the melancholy, the burleſque, or whatever other characters may be thought more juſt. We can hardly look upon the works of many of the Dutch painters, without remarking their relation to the compoſitions of Rabelais, and of Butler, author of Hudibras.

In

In the various fields, whether of ſacred, civil, or fabulous hiſtory, are ſtill to be found many excellent ſubjects yet untouched by painters. I ſhall conclude this letter by mentioning two examples, one from the Grecian, and another from the Chriſtian hiſtory. When Pauſanias found that the ſervant to whom he had given a letter to be conveyed to Artabazus, had taken ſanctuary in a temple at ſome diſtance from Sparta, he went there, and earneſtly entreated the ſervant not to ruin him. The magiſtrates of Sparta were concealed in the temple, that they might have a proof of Pauſanias's guilt, by overhearing what paſſed, which was neceſſary by the Spartan law. In returning to the city, a friend of Pauſanias, by a particular ſignal, let him know that he was betrayed. Pauſanias thereupon run to the next temple to ſave his life. But the magiſtrates ordered the door of the temple to be ſecured, that he might not eſcape; and we are told that his mother, then very old, with a true Spartan

ſpirit,

ſpirit, having learned her ſon's treachery, aſſiſted in rolling a ſtone to the door of the temple. When he was about to expire, he was carried out and laid on the ground, that the temple might not be polluted by the dead body. The citizens, being collected in great numbers about him, ſome of them were of opinion, that, as a criminal, he ought to be buried under the ſpot where he ſhould die. Others inſiſted, that, conſidering the greatneſs of the man, and what he had done for his country, he ought at leaſt to have an honourable funeral. This piece of hiſtory would furniſh different ſubjects to painters, according to the point of time they might find beſt to ſuit their taſte.

The example which I ſhall mention from ſacred hiſtory hath always appeared to me to merit the moſt delicate pencil. The paſſage, as it is related by St Luke, ſtands thus: "And about the ſpace of an hour "after, another confidently affirmed, ſay-"ing, Of a truth this fellow alſo was with "him,

" him, for he is a Galilean. And Peter
" ſaid, Man, I know not what thou ſay-
" eſt; and immediately, while he yet
" ſpake, the cock crew. And the Lord
" turned, and looked upon Peter; and
" Peter remembered the word of the Lord,
" how he had ſaid unto him, Before the
" cock crow, thou ſhall deny me thrice.
" And Peter went out and wept bitterly."
The late circumſtantial prediction, and the correſponding event, being, by this look, poured full in upon his mind, at once overwhelm him. This critical look, on the one ſide, producing an inſtantaneous recollection, and conſciouſneſs of guilt, on the other, is the moment for the painter. I know St Peter's denial of his maſter, with ſome concomitant circumſtances, hath often been a ſubject of the pencil; but I do not remember that any painter hath taken it preciſely at this point of time *.

* Perhaps the ſeeming contrariety in the different relations of this event, might have deterred the painters from undertaking it, conſidering it as an improper ſubject

ſubject of their art. By St Matthew's account, Peter was in the porch of the palace. St Mark ſayeth, as Peter was beneath in the palace, and a little after he went out unto the porch. St Luke hath it thus: And when they had kindled a fire in the midſt of the hall, and were ſet down together, Peter ſat down among them. By St John's account, he was ſomewhere about the fire kindled in the lower room, near the porch. Theſe paſſages are not properly explained in any of the commentaries that have fallen in my way; and the adverſaries of Chriſtianity conſider them as wholly contradictory.

With the antients, houſes in which public courts of juſtice were kept, were ſpacious, and conſequently had large roofs. But, as they did not underſtand the art of roofing ſo well as the moderns, excepting when their buildings were vaulted, they ſupported their extenſive platforms with one or more rows of pillars, paſſing either lengthwiſe, or acroſs theſe public halls. This made two or more rooms, ſeparated only by columns. The inner room was ſometimes elevated above the other by a few ſteps, perhaps four or five, upon the uppermoſt of which the pillars reſted. Thus the company in the inner or upper room had a full view of thoſe in the lower, and even of thoſe in the portico, the doors of which, we may believe, were kept open during the adminiſtration of juſtice. From this conſtruction of the public buildings of the antients, whether temples, courts of juſtice, or others, the whole paſ-

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ſages are reconciled; for it mattereth not whether it be ſaid that Peter ſtood beneath, in the outer hall, or in the portico, as it is pretty obvious he muſt have paſſed from the one to the other during this tranſaction. This paſſage hath been more explicitly treated, in order to ſhow that a moderate acquaintance with antiquity is frequently ſufficient to reconcile paſſages of antient authors, which ſeem to ſtand in direct oppoſition to one another.

LETTER

LETTER XXVII.

To Lælius.

HORACE's advice to poets is equally applicable to painters,

Sumite materiam veſtris qui *pingitis* aequam
Viribus.

A painter, whoſe talents are ſuited to the meaneſt or moſt groteſque ſubjects of the Flemiſh ſchool, would be unhappy in attempting the antique and ſublime of the Roman. Between theſe two, ſubjects for painters are no leſs various than thoſe of poets between Homer and Hudibras. Whatever can be ſuppoſed to make the cataſtrophe of tragedy is, of all kinds, the moſt affecting. But, unleſs the fable be generally known, it is not an eaſy matter for the artiſt to mark the piece with ſuch circum-

ſtances as ſhall lead us immediately to his meaning. Iphigenia at the altar, with the prieſts, her friends, and guards attending, will be readily known by all who have read the ſtory, or the tragedies on that ſubject. But a Beliſarius in rags, though retaining a dignity of countenance, and the by-ſtanders overcome with compaſſion, as in Vandyke's beautiful painting, are inſufficient to let us into the deſign, without the ſignature, *Date obolum Beliſario.* Horace's advice, therefore, to chooſe well known fables, rather than to attempt ſuch as are wholly new, is likewiſe no leſs ſeaſonable to painters than to authors of tragedy, ſince both may make the ſubjects their own, by their peculiar manner of repreſenting them.

> Difficile eſt proprie communia dicere, tuque
> Rectius Iliacum carmen deducis in actus,
> Quam ſi proferres ignota indictaque primus.

Though the great painters, eſpecially thoſe who were happy in compoſition, intended

tended their works rather for the learned than for the ignorant, it is frequently difficult to diſcover what part of hiſtory their pieces are meant to repreſent. Something that might ſerve as a key to paſſages of hiſtory, otherwiſe equivocal, would be of uſe even to thoſe who are well acquainted both with the antient and modern hiſtorians and poets. A dying Epaminondas cannot well be diſtinguiſhed from many heroes of antiquity who ſhared a ſimilar fate. His laſt ſaying, therefore, would be ſufficient to one who knows his ſtory, *Satis vixi, quoniam invictus morior.* Paſſages of this kind have, like mottos, a poignant ſignificance, and might be ſubjoined, though the ſubject of the painting ſhould be ſufficiently obvious. Æneas, with his father on his ſhoulders, his ſon at his ſide, and the city in flames behind them, muſt be known at firſt ſight by all who have looked into the Æneid. But we would not examine the painting with leſs pleaſure, were we to find there *nec me labor iſte gravabit.* Milo,

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caught in the oak, is an excellent ſubject to exhibit the muſcles in full exertion. If I be not miſtaken, there is ſomewhere a fine painting, copied from the ſtatue of Milo at Verſailles, the work of Puget, one of the beſt modern ſculptors. The following paſſage from Juvenal would ſuit it well.

——————Viribus ille
Confiſus periit, admirandiſque lacertis.

Theſe ſentences, with the reſpective paintings, prove moral lectures. Our generous feelings are moved, when we conſider what a low value the Spartan chief ſet upon life, when in competition with the ſafety of his country; and we hardly regret his death, when we find him meeting it with indifference, from a conſciouſneſs of having ſaved his fellow citizens from ſlavery. The ſaying of Æneas, though put in his mouth by the poet, is elegantly expreſſive of filial duty and affection. In the laſt caſe, the mind is impreſſed with the ideas of the fatal miſapplica-

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tion of the gifts of Nature. The Roman authors abound with paſſages well ſuited to lead one to the meaning of paintings, and, to a mind not wholly callous, can ſcarcely fail to ſuggeſt moral, and frequently affecting reflections. We ſometimes meet with theſe ſubjoined to engravings; but the painters, probably from an idea that ſuch inſcriptions would deface their works, ſeem to have avoided them. A ſhort emphatical ſentence, however, in ſmall characters, and faintly traced, would be an elegant method of indicating their meaning. The ingenious Abbé du Bos remarks the propriety of a monumental inſcription in Pouſſin's Arcadia. By this, the celebrated painter artfully lets us know the country repreſented, whilſt he adds a ſolemn dignity to the piece.

The generality of mankind, eſpecially thoſe of taſte, are known to deſire variety, as a relief to the mind, and that not only in the ſame ſcene, but changes of ſcenery.

This

This may be conſidered as a touchſtone of true and falſe taſte; for no perſon of a refined taſte will wiſh to change things of greater elegance for thoſe of leſs. Thus, in changing the furniture of a houſe, if one ſhould remove good paintings, drawings, or engravings, and ſhould ſubſtitute Chineſe paintings, that perſon may juſtly be ſuſpected of a falſe taſte, ſince, in place of juſt repreſentations of nature, he can tolerate figuring, in which the three moſt bewitching requiſites in painting are not to be found. Theſe are, the clear-obſcure, proportion, and perſpective. Nor are the vivid colours a ſufficient compenſation for the improprieties in theſe mean, aukward, and often groteſque copies of Nature.

It may be obſerved here, that the power of cuſtom and of faſhion is ſo ſtrong, and frequently operates ſo forcibly on the minds even of thoſe of a true taſte, as to make them adopt a leſs for a greater degree of elegance. This proceeds rather from a de-

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ſire to avoid a ludicrous ſingularity, than that thoſe of a taſte highly refined are unqualified to diſtinguiſh wherein elegance conſiſts. There are ſome things in which a decline, however moderate, from the ſtandard of elegance, readily appears; ſuch are dreſs, houſehold furniture, and equipages of all kinds, in which utility and convenience ought to direct, and be conſidered as a ſtandard. But people, for the moſt part, from an emulation to excel others in theſe or the like circumſtances, are more attentive to an oſtentatious exhibition of ornaments than to utility, or to that degree of ſimplicity which, in a great meaſure, conſtitutes elegance.

There are, however, ſome other things in which deviations from elegance are ſo gradual and imperceptible as to elude the obſervation even of thoſe who poſſeſs the moſt penetrating genius, and refined taſte. Of this, language is a ſtriking example; nor can any living language be produced

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as a proof of this truth, ſince no nation can aſcertain the preciſe period in which its language reaches the greateſt pitch of purity, or when it begins to decline. Hence we become better judges of the progreſs of the dead languages, than of that of our own. Had the Roman authors who flouriſhed about the end of the republican and beginning of the imperial ſtate, been regarded by thoſe who followed the Auguſtan age as ſtandards of language and ſtyle, the purity of the Latin would have been thus better preſerved, than by attempting higher degrees of refinement. We may judge of this from Tacitus, who, though his powers, as an hiſtorian, and the elegance of his ſtyle, be readily acknowledged, is, however, leſs perſpicuous than Cicero, Salluſt, Caeſar, or Livy. In reading theſe, we are conſcious of an attracting power; and we quit them with reluctance. But, when we read Tacitus, we find, whether from the leſs obvious connections of that author, an exertion on our ſide, and a greater degree

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of attention requiſite. Quintilian and the younger Pliny, though they wrote a century later than the period of the greateſt purity, imitated the ſtyle of thoſe who had lived in it.

After having ſeen a variety of paintings, one comes to diſcover the ſtyle of the moſt diſtinguiſhed maſters. This is the more obvious, when the manner of the ſchool conſpires with that of the artiſt, in characterizing his works. Thus Julio Romano, Paulo Veroneſe, the Carracci, particularly Annibal, Le Brun, and Rembrand, had each of them, beſides the manner of his reſpective ſchool, a ſtyle peculiar to himſelf. Men of fortune have ſometimes proceeded on this piece of knowledge, in purchaſing coſtly paintings, and have thus been laid open to much impoſition; for one is not qualified to judge critically of paintings, merely from a knowledge of the ſtyle of the more eminent maſters, which is frequently preſerved in copies, though

much inferior to the originals; nor can the ſtyle of particular maſters be always ſufficiently aſcertained, many of them having changed their taſte in the different periods of their lives. Titian is ſaid, in the courſe of his long life, to have changed his manner four times. The numberleſs copies which have been imported into Britain, as undoubted originals, at a great expence, and the frauds which have been afterwards detected by judges of a better taſte than the purchaſers, have proved detrimental to the art; for others who have wiſhed to be poſſeſſed of paintings, being apprehenſive of the like deceit, have been deterred from purchaſing.

It hath been obſerved, that a good painter ought not to be diſtinguiſhable by a particular ſtyle; and that it marks the art of the maſter to be able ſo to vary his manner as not to be known by any peculiarity. Though this obſervation be not without its weight, it is not to be received as univer-

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ſally juſt. A painter may be ſuppoſed ſo highly qualified as to copy any part of nature with the greateſt accuracy, eaſe, and elegance, which, with ſtrength and boldneſs of execution, may be ſufficient characters of his works; and from theſe he ought never to depart. It would not have added to Virgil's poetical character, had he, in different parts of his works, fallen ſo far in with the manner of Ovid, of Lucan, or of any other Roman poet, as in theſe paſſages not to be diſtinguiſhed from them. We are better pleaſed to ſee Virgil throughout, whether his ſtyle be paſtoral, epic, or that appropriated to huſbandry, or even when he diverſifies each of theſe. It may be an advantage both to a poet and a painter to imitate others of higher character. But, beſides that, in theſe imitations, we look in vain for originality, one of a refined taſte, and well acquainted with theſe arts, will diſcover the ſervility, unleſs the imitator poſſeſs powers little inferior to thoſe of the original author or artiſt. One, in reading

reading Perſius, can hardly fail to judge him an imitator of Horace; and the obſcurity of this author ſeems to proceed chiefly from an affectation of Horace's elegant eaſe.

To conclude theſe obſervations, we may learn from the painters, that, were the human mind always poſſeſſed of the means of bringing out its powers, a fertility of invention, and juſtneſs of taſte, would be found more general among mankind than is commonly believed. Had not the great painters been able to convey their thoughts, and diſcover their abilities, by means of the pencil, they would have paſſed unnoticed among the herd of mankind.

LETTER

LETTER XXVIII.

To Hortensia.

I Know you are not unacquainted with the advantages to be reaped from company and converſation, whether theſe ſerve merely as paſtime, or for the more valuable purpoſe of the information and improvement of the mind. The company in which I was laſt evening, yielded every benefit that can be derived from the ſocial intercourſe of a few hours. Temperate reaſoning, ingenious ſpeculations, and occaſional ſallies of humour, conſpired equally to inſtruction and to a general animation. No interruption in ſpeaking, no confuſion of tongues, no altercations were heard. Though our ſociety conſiſted of ranks widely different, there was no affectation

tation of ſuperiority on the one ſide, nor fawning compliances on the other. We did not part till after midnight.

Were I to addreſs you in a poetical guiſe, I would tell you, that, in my return homewards, I found nature in a ſtate of profound tranquillity. The trees and other vegetables aſleep, as the botaniſts ſpeak; not a leaf in motion. No noiſe was heard, except perhaps the watchful guardian of ſome diſtant cottage, announcing to all within his circle of hearing, not to diſturb his maſter's manſion, till his friends within ſhould awake; not the only leſſon of gratitude and fidelity to be learned from this truſty animal. The air was mild and pure. The ſilver moon, with a full orb, proceeded ſlowly, but with dignity, in her nocturnal journey through the azure vault of heaven. The mind, ſoothed, and at the ſame time elevated by ſuch circumſtances, becomes conſcious of all its powers, particularly of the fecundity of the imagination,

tion, and, like the body after long reſt, is diſpoſed to exertion, and ſeems to acquire an uncommon degree of the creative faculty. As new ideas are ſtarted, they run ſpontaneouſly into order; and, though edifices thus reared be of the aerial kind, they may ſtill have their beauties. Nor are ſuch mental excentricities always without a moral influence. Were it not ſo, our beſt novels and romances would be compoſed to little purpoſe. During theſe workings in the ſenſory, I could have wiſhed for an opportunity of committing the whole to writing. My recollection of them, at preſent, is imperfect; and, by the intervention of a night, the materials are ſo mutilated, that, were I to endeavour to put them together, they would make but a Gothic pile, and that of the meaneſt kind.

In this ſhort and contemplative journey, you had a ſhare of my thoughts. I have often applauded your attachment to the ſtudy of nature; and, as often regretted, that

that no unexceptionable ſyſtem of this branch of ſcience for female readers hath yet appeared. The method of inveſtigating the different departments of nature, which appears to me the moſt proper, is to begin with the minute parts, or thoſe which may be ſaid to lie beneath us, and aſcend, through the varied gradation, to the higheſt. The microſcope affords much entertainment, and we diſcover by it beauty, order, and deſign. But it is thoſe parts of nature that are above us, which tend to enlarge and elevate the mind, and to impreſs it with ſtriking and reverential ideas of the Author of all things.

The ſtudy of aſtronomy I have obſerved to produce the ſame effects in all young minds; that is, ſtrong deſires to know many circumſtances which lie beyond our power of diſcovering, while we remain in our preſent ſtate. In conſequence of your reading Ferguſon's volume, you ſtarted ſome queſtions of this nature; ſuch as, whether

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there be inhabitants in the other planets? If there be, whether they reſemble the inhabitants of this earth? This ſtill being the caſe, whether the oeconomy of nature with them be the ſame as with us? Your wiſh for ſolutions of theſe problems, cannot be ſtronger than my inclination to gratify you, were it in my power. A conjectural thought or two, therefore, and even theſe meriting little attention, are all I can venture upon. In theſe I ſhall go no further than our conſtant and faithful attendant the moon. That that planet, as well as all the reſt, of whatever denomination, ſwarms with inhabitants, like this earth, I think there is little room to doubt. But there are, if I miſtake not, ſtrong reaſons to believe that the inhabitants of our neighbouring planet differ widely from us. Such is the nature of our bodies that they require reſt once in twenty-four hours. The day is of a proper length for labour and exerciſe. The night ſufficeth for reſt, when we are again fitted for our daily occupations.

This diviſion of time, correſponding ſo exactly to the neceſſities of animal bodies, diſplays a remarkable harmony in nature.

The caſe is far otherwiſe with the inhabitants of the moon. In place of twenty-four hours, their day and night, taken together, amount to twenty-nine of our days, and upwards; ſo that in our whole year they have but twelve days, and ſomewhat more. From this extraordinary difference in the diviſion of time in that planet, from that in ours, we have no reaſon to doubt, that Nature, conſiſtent with herſelf, and preſerving her uſual harmony, muſt have framed inhabitants there with bodies and conſtitutions correſponding to this diviſion of time. In the natural oeconomy of theſe two planets, there is another remarkable difference. All the inhabitants of the earth have their ſhare of the light, both of the ſun and moon; and that, for the moſt part, once in twenty-four hours. This earth makes a very large luminary to the moon;

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its ſurface, to an inhabitant of the moon, being thirteen times as large as that of the moon to us. Notwithſtanding which, if the whole ſurface of the moon be equally ſupplied with inhabitants, it is but one half of theſe inhabitants that can enjoy the pleaſure of this luminary, unleſs they travel from one ſide of the moon to the other for this gratification. But we cannot conclude that this unequal diſtribution of light is without its final cauſe. It is, therefore, to be believed, either that the inhabitants of one ſide of that planet are different from thoſe of the other, or, that there is a ſupply of light to that ſide of the moon which is conſtantly removed from us, however unable we may be to trace whence ſuch a ſupply can flow.

To mention one circumſtance more, an inhabitant of the moon muſt breathe, if he breathe at all, an air exquiſitely rare, and bearing no proportion to that which involves this earth. Were the length of our

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day here equal to two weeks, and our night as long, ſuch is the nature of our atmoſphere, that one half of the earth would be every day ſcorched to a great degree, and the other half frozen; ſo that vegetation would ſoon be at an end; and if any part of the earth were to be found habitable, it would be only towards the poles. Hence we may infer, that, if there be any atmoſphere about the moon, it muſt be ſo extremely rare as to be imperceptible to us, even with the aſſiſtance of our optic glaſſes: And, were the inhabitants of the moon of the ſame nature with us, they could no more ſubſiſt with our atmoſphere there, than we could with theirs here, if there be ſuch an atmoſphere.

LETTER XXIX.

To Hortensia.

WHETHER we dream aſleep or awake, doth not greatly matter, provided the mind be properly, or, at leaſt, not improperly employed. Having finiſhed my laſt letter to you, I laid myſelf back in my chair, and, relieving my mind of every kind of exertion, I gave full play to my ideas. A degree of ſtupor inſenſibly ſucceeding, much new ſcenery preſented itſelf; and my mind being deeply impreſſed with the ſubject in which I had been engaged juſt before, I had, in my ſleep, a temporary and ideal gratification of my aſtronomical wiſh. I was immediately tranſlated to the moon; for you know, when aſleep, we can traverſe the planetary ſyſtem with

with more eaſe than we can viſit a friend in the country when awake.

I found the moon abounding with inhabitants; who, though ſimilar to our ſpecies, were ſtill of a form more divine and angelic. The mildneſs and complacency of their countenances indicated their internal tranquility; and I ſoon diſcovered, not only that the whole conduct of their lives was regulated by reaſon, as a ſtandard, but that their prevailing motive to action was benevolence. Hence they were conſtantly occupied in doing good offices to one another. I was overcome by their attention to, and aſſiduities about me; and I ſpared no pains to let them know the deep ſenſe I had of their goodneſs. My expreſſions of the obligations under which they laid me, I obſerved, to my no ſmall ſurpriſe, to be coldly received, or rather, to be wholly diſregarded. But I ſoon diſcovered that this people, being actuated by an inſtinctive principle of goodneſs, and thus being

being ſufficiently rewarded by the pleaſure ariſing from the performance of good offices, neither offer nor expect acknowledgments for theſe reciprocal ſervices. For the return of acknowledgments for good offices, ſo common among mankind, proceeds from a tacit ſuppoſition of trouble or inconvenience attending the performance of them.

The term *juſtice*, and many other words expreſſive of virtuous actions, are unknown there, becauſe their oppoſite vices are unknown. All poſitive inſtitutions, ſimilar to human laws, would be uſeleſs among the inhabitants of this planet. Valour, patriotiſm, and friendſhip, on which I recollected to have lately read ſome curious obſervations, make no part of the language there. Theſe good people, having no paſſion for oſtentation, nor ambition for popular applauſe, are never ſtimulated by theſe motives to perform feats of valour. Their courage, however, is occaſionally brought to proof; but as we ſee an hen, though

though naturally a timid and inoffenſive animal, fly on a maſtiff, to ſave her chicks, ſo theſe people, however mild and gentle, never heſitate to reſcue their fellows from impending danger, though at the riſk of their own lives. The moon itſelf being the only country of every inhabitant, the words Patriot and Patriotiſm would be wholly inſignificant, where no limits or land-marks are known, no wars, no law-ſuits for the extent of territory. The term Friendſhip, being expreſſive of a virtue leſs diffuſive than Univerſal Benevolence, is ſuperſeded by the uſe of the latter. The benevolence of each individual becomes more intenſe, as his intercourſe with thoſe within the ſphere of his acquaintance increaſeth; and though he be wholly a ſtranger to intereſted motives, he is amply a gainer by the good offices ariſing from the benevolent affections of others. Inſults, affronts, revenge, with other vindictive and malevolent paſſions, being non-entities in that happy ſtate, theſe terms can find no place in a

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lunar vocabulary. But, to undertake a particular diſcuſſion of every thing relating to the moral oeconomy of this happy republic, would require more time than I mean to beſtow upon it.

I found the corporeal organs of thoſe ſons of happineſs, like the faculties of their minds, more perfect than ours. They were able to diſcern, by their eyes alone, mountains, ſeas, and lakes in our earth. Cities appeared like ſpots irregularly diſſeminated on the different parts of its ſurface. They could even ſee the larger ſhips, which they believed to be ſea-monſters. Juſt before my arrival, ſome lunar Galileo or Newton, having invented teleſcopes, ſuited to lunar, but not to terreſtrial eyes, many of their philoſophical inquirers were occupied in looking at the objects of their vaſt moon. This afforded much entertainment, not only from the great extent of the luminary, but from having an opportunity of examining the different parts of Europe,

Aſia, Africa, and America, fourteen times in one night. Having their teleſcopes, by accident, directed on the Netherlands, they diſcovered, what they had taken for ſpots, to be cities; and, as they could, by the aſſiſtance of theſe inſtruments, diſtinguiſh human figures, though minute, they admired the great concourſe of people collected within ſuch ſmall ſpaces. They interpreted this to proceed from the ſtrong attachment and affection which ſubſiſt among mankind. They likewiſe put a favourable conſtruction on the ornamental figuring with which they obſerved theſe cities encircled. This is a-kin to what we may remark even on our earth, where thoſe of the moſt happy temperament of mind are conſtantly diſpoſed to ſet things, though unfavourable in themſelves, in the moſt favourable point of view. I never felt my mind ſo much diſpoſed to diſſimulation: And, therefore, thought it better not to undeceive them, by explaining the nature and deſign of fortification. For thus I muſt

have let them know, that theſe works were intended to ſecure one part of mankind from the ravages and rapine of another; and likewiſe, that they were conſtructed in ſuch a manner, that thoſe within might, by methods the eaſieſt, quickeſt, and ſafeſt to themſelves, deſtroy their enemies without. This would have proved an unhappy detection of human nature to theſe happieſt of beings.

The earth, proceeding in her diurnal rotation, brought England and her metropolis in view. They dwelt long on this city, and were delighted with the multiplicity of carriages and people traverſing the ſtreets every where. They obſerved, in one of the largeſt ſtreets, a chariot drawn by four horſes, and great numbers of people crouding about it. Some of the croud, removing the horſes, dragged the carriage along, with conſiderable rapidity, to its place of deſtination. This excited the admiration of the obſervers, who ſaid, that no

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ſuch mark of benevolence and affection had ever been known in the moon; and thus they were confirmed in their opinion of the happy nature of man. I, who knew the conſtitution of my terreſtrial friends better, had no room to doubt, that what they ſaw was the effect of an endemic paroxyſm, to which the populace of great cities, and particularly of this capital, are frequently liable. I heartily wiſhed theſe objects out of the view of the teleſcopes, leſt this ebulition ſhould degenerate into an untractable calenture, in which the phrenſy ſometimes riſes to a pitch ſo high, as to prompt that brain-ſick people to fly about the city, and deſtroy whatever belongs to their neighbours.

England at length diſappearing, the Atlantic Ocean ſucceeded; and the next objects which raiſed theſe good people's curioſity, were two great companies of ſea monſters. The full blown ſails, ſeen through the inſtruments, confirmed their idea of tremendous

dous and ſhapeleſs animals; and ſo much ſpread canvaſs concealed the ſailors below. They next remarked, that the two companies, as they approached, began to ſpout fire at one another; which, increaſing to a great degree, ſome of them were ſeen in flames, others ſinking, and many of them at length totally diſappeared. This ſcene being over, the benevolent obſervers ſaid it was a fortunate circumſtance, in the courſe of things, that the nature of theſe immane animals was ſuch as to ſtimulate them to deſtroy one another, leſt at any time, coming out of the ſea, they might diſturb the felicity of the amiable inhabitants of that world. This was the third time I had eſcaped being brought under the neceſſity of exhibiting the condition of man in its proper colours.

The earth continuing to roll eaſtward, America came under the teleſcopes. Cities, rivers, woods, and other objects, afforded ample matter of ſpeculation. At length an extended plain appeared, in which were ſeen,

ſeen, oppoſite to, and at ſome diſtance from one another, two large bodies of men arranged in long lines, and diſpoſed in beautiful and regular order. The expectations of the lunar obſervers were raiſed to an extraordinary degree by theſe new objects; and they prognoſticated, not a fatal cataſtrophe from ſuch a number of men collected together, and ſo beautifully arranged, but an event marking the benevolent affections of mankind more than any thing they had ſeen before. With reſpect to myſelf, I now foreſaw matters to be near a criſis. I knew theſe to be two European armies who had expoſed themſelves to the dangers of a vaſt ocean, and to the greater danger of meeting one another there, in order to take poſſeſſion of kingdoms to which neither the one nor the other could lay any juſt claim; reſolved, at the ſame time, to deſtroy whoever ſhould oppoſe them, whether Europeans, or even the natives of theſe countries.

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As the two armies approached, the curioſity of the obſervers encreaſed. But, to their great ſurpriſe, the ſpouting of fire began here as they had ſeen it a little before in the ſea-ſcene. The two armies were ſoon ſo involved in ſmoke, that no part of them could be ſeen. I heartily wiſhed this cloud to continue till this affecting and humiliating ſpectacle ſhould be at an end. But, in a while, a freſh breeze ſpringing up, brought the armies full in view again. By this time one of them was thrown wholly into confuſion, the other purſuing and pouring fire among them. Hundreds were ſeen lying on the ground; ſome endeavouring to riſe, others wreathing their bodies in a manner expreſſive of exquiſite agony, and many lying motionleſs. I ſhall neither pretend to paint the marks of aſtoniſhment in my lunar friends, nor my own diſtreſs. One of them aſked me the meaning of all this. I felt reluctant to return an anſwer. The whole company, ſurpriſed at my ſilence, turned their eyes upon

upon me. I was ſenſible of a glow in my face, and my whole frame was ſoon thrown into the utmoſt confuſion. I ſeriouſly wiſhed it had been in my power to ſink into the moon, when a favourite ſpaniel, applying his cold noſe to my hand, awaked me with a ſtart.

Thus, good Hortenſia, was exhibited in the nocturnal drama of Morpheus, an ideal piece of ſcenery which we can never expect to ſee awake; that is, a comparative view of the ſtate of man, with that of a people who love their neighbours as themſelves.

LETTER XXX.

To Hortensia.

THE ſubject on which you deſired my ſentiments hath not greatly occupied my mind; for, however much I am delighted with muſic, I cannot conſider myſelf as qualified to treat that enchanting branch of the liberal arts ſcientifically. But, that I may not be wholly ſilent, take the following obſervations.

The taſte of muſic, like that of language, is not only different in different countries, but is found to vary in the ſame country at different periods. About a century ago, and ſeveral years later, a grave and ſolemn ſtyle of muſic prevailed. But, in later times, muſic hath degenerated into a ſtyle of leſs

dignity: Its excellence, it would appear, conſiſting rather in its rapidity, and in the difficulty of execution, than in the harmony of the parts. It is, therefore, a matter of importance to attend to the period in which muſic hath been at its greateſt height of refinement; for it is with muſic as with languages, attempts to refine it, beyond a certain degree, prove the cauſe of its decline.

Both painting and muſic have been conſidered as marking the characters of nations. When the ſchools of painting flouriſhed, ſo great was the difference between the ſtyles of the Flemiſh, French, and Italian ſchools, that an ordinary judge could diſtinguiſh them. The Lombard, Roman, and Venetian ſchools, had likewiſe their reſpective characters; eſpecially in the time of the Carraccis, of Titian and Paul Veroneſe, and of thoſe in the Roman ſchool who followed Raphael and Michael Angelo. Critical judges in muſic have made the ſame obſervation

obſervation with reſpect to that art. Muſic of the grave, ſolemn, and harmonious kind, made its firſt appearance in Europe among the Flemiſh, even before it was much known in Italy. I mention this, becauſe the character of the Flemiſh, at that time, correſponded with that of the Spaniards, and conſequently with the dignified ſtyle of muſic which then prevailed in that part of the Netherlands. But with that people, as well as with the other nations of Europe at preſent, the melody and harmony of that art are leſs regarded than the difficult and laborious execution of the performers.

We may further judge how far muſic is expreſſive of the characters of nations, from a controverſy which happened between the Abbé Raguenet and Goully, about half a century ago. The former of theſe attempted to prove the ſuperiority of the Italian muſic and opera over thoſe of the French; the other undertook the oppoſite argument. This diſpute was carried on with great warmth

warmth on both ſides; and it appears from ſeveral paſſages, that the authors believed the genius and character of the two nations to be deeply concerned.

It is hardly neceſſary to obſerve, that vocal muſic is preferable to every other kind. There are few, if any, ſo far deprived of a muſical ear, as not to be ſenſible of a more or leſs melodious voice. Some are obſerved to poſſeſs this melody of voice to ſuch a degree, that, in hearing them ſpeak, we are pleaſed with the ſound, though we loſe the ſenſe. That the voice alone is, in many caſes, intended by Nature to expreſs the ſtate of the mind, appears even from the inferior animals. But a philoſophical diſcuſſion of this curious ſubject is not intended here. In ſinging, when we are conſcious the execution is attended with difficulty, while, at the ſame time, it is conducted with art and taſte, we naturally ſympathize with the performer; and, when ſympathy takes the lead, the other

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ſoft affections, or whatever paſſions are meant to be moved by the muſic, ſponta-neouſly follow. Though an elegant form, and graceful manners, have a conſiderable influence in recommending vocal muſic, greater ſtreſs hath ſometimes been laid on theſe than they can well bear. When our attention is attracted by a melodious voice, the performer being unſeen, we can hard-ly perſuade ourſelves that elegance of form and manners is wanting in that perſon. The liquid and melodious voices of the nuns, in ſinging their anthems, convey to one who overhears them an idea of that ſimplicity and devotional ſweetneſs, which is more affecting than all the arts of the the coquet or the proud. In general, we have reaſon to believe, that, from whatever natural cauſe, muſical notes, ariſing from the modulation of human, or of other ani-mal voices, will always be found more agreeable than the ſame notes from unfeel-ing inſtruments. Even the warblings of birds, though frequently a confuſion of ſounds,

ſounds, pleaſe us; but the ſame ſounds, were they to proceed from a mechanical inſtrument, conſtructed for that purpoſe, would be found irkſome.

LETTER XXXI.

To Hortensia.

I Cannot deny the propriety of your objection to dwelling long on general hiſtory. We frequently find it little more than a complicated view of the vices of mankind. The intrigues and machinations of courts, their attempts to over-reach one another, and that by methods in themſelves unwarrantable, and by which people, in a private ſtation, would lay themſelves open to the ſcourge of penal laws; the boaſted conduct of generals; in other words, the deſtruction of mankind, are ſubjects ill ſuited to a delicate mind. Your attachment

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to biography, therefore, is not to be condemned, provided a proper ſelection of lives can be found.

Had I known your intention to read Cicero's life, I would have adviſed you to begin with Plutarch's life of that philoſopher, and afterwards to read Dr Middleton's, leſt the latter ſhould give you a diſlike to the other. It is well, however, that you are ſo far pleaſed with Plutarch's manner, that you reſolve to read the whole of his lives. Here I would recommend it warmly to you to read theſe lives in a chronological order, and not as they are commonly arranged. To one not well acquainted with chronology, the order in which they have been conveyed to us from the author, is apt to give perplexed ideas of the order both of time and of the events. I would adviſe you, therefore, firſt to read the lives of the Greeks, beginning with the Athenians. My reaſon for this is, that there are more Athenian lives, and theſe better

better connected, than thoſe of any other of the Greek ſtates. Thus you will have a regular detail of the affairs and revolutions of the Athenian republic, from the time that Solon had the direction of the government, till the death of Phocion, including a period of 280 years. This is the moſt intereſting period of the moſt celebrated ſtate of Greece; and the only chaſm in it is from Solon to Themiſtocles; nor is this of much importance; for the tyrants Piſiſtratus and his ſons had then the direction of the commonwealth. The Athenian hiſtory, before the days of Solon, is checquered with fable, and many circumſtances in it not well authenticated. After the death of Phocion, that people, whether from the effects of luxury, licentiouſneſs, and caballing at home, or from a venality terminating in ſlavery to other ſtates, particularly to the Macedonian, never made any conſiderable figure. Another advantage ariſing from this line of Athenian chiefs is, that it proves a chronological directory for ſeveral of the other lives.

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The order, then, in which the Athenians ought to be read, is as follows: Theſeus, Solon, Themiſtocles, Ariſtides, Cimon, Pericles, Nicias, Alcibiades, Demoſthenes, Phocion. Theſeus, having lived in the fabulous times, his life hath no connection with the reſt. The Spartans claim the next place; but, as they are much disjoined, the two laſt of them will be better left to a later period. The others are Lycurgus, Lyſander, and Ageſilaus. The firſt of theſe three lived very early, and that legiſlator is wholly unconnected with the following chiefs of that ſtate. Pelopidas the Theban, being a contemporary of Ageſilaus, falls next in order. Here it will be proper to read, were it but in a biographical dictionary, or perhaps in a tranſlation of Cornelius Nepos, the life of Epaminondas: For this celebrated general is diſtinguiſhed no leſs for his character, as a private citizen, than for the part he acted on the theatre of Greece at the head of an army. After theſe two Thebans, proceed

to Artaxerxes, the Perſian monarch, diſtinguiſhed by the name of Mnemon; then to Alexander, and his two ſucceſſors, Eumenes and Demetrius. The lives of Agis, Cleomenes, Aratus, and Philopoemen, who figured about the ſame time in the Peloponneſus, are next to be read. There remains ſtill three, who may be taken laſt, becauſe their theatres of action were more in Sicily and Italy than in Greece; theſe are Dion, Timoleon, and Pyrrhus.

The order in which the Roman lives, from Romulus to the ſecond Punic war, ought to be read, is obvious; for they are generally ſeparated from one another by ſome diſtance of time. But, in coming further down, and particularly when we approach the period in which the republic made the laſt ſtruggles for liberty, we fall in with a conſtellation of citizens, who diſtinguiſhed themſelves either in arms, or by their political conduct. As many of theſe were contemporaries, it requires attention

tention to claſs their lives, ſo as to read them with the greateſt advantage. For this purpoſe, it will be better to arrange them not by their births, but by their deaths, excepting thoſe who retired early from buſineſs. Cicero was born ſix years before Caeſar, and Caeſar ſeven years before Cato. But, as Cato died one year before Caeſar, and Caeſar two years before Cicero, the order of their lives, in biographical hiſtory, ought to be contrary to that of their births; and, for the ſame reaſon, when any of theſe chiefs retired from buſineſs, they are to be conſidered as dead to the ſtate. Thus, with reſpect to Lucullus and Craſſus, the life of the former ought to be prior to that of the other, becauſe Lucullus betook himſelf early to a private life, while Craſſus continued on the theatre of action till his death. Agreeable to theſe obſervations, the arrangement of the Roman lives will be as follows.

Romulus,

Romulus, Numa Pompilius, Valerius Poplicola, Coriolanus, Furius Camillus, Marcellus, Fabius Maximus, Cato the Cenſor, Quintius Flaminius, Paulus Æmilius, Tiberius and Caius Gracchus, Marius, Sylla, Sertorius, Lucullus, Craſſus, Pompey, Cato of Utica, Caeſar, Cicero, Brutus, Anthony, Galba, Otho.

As no hiſtorical compilation hath been more univerſally read than that of Plutarch, we might have expected that ſome librarian, in whatever period, would have claſſed and publiſhed theſe lives in chronological order. That in which they have always been arranged, is for the ſake of the author's parallels. Theſe compariſons have not been deemed the moſt valuable of Plutarch's remains. They ought not, however, to be loſt. Were they ſubjoined to the lives, perhaps making a volume by themſelves, they might be conſulted by readers at pleaſure. I ſhall only obſerve further, that, from the diverſity of characters among

mong mankind, Plutarch hath been obliged to compare his heroes rather from a ſimilarity in their fortunes, than in the powers and diſpoſitions of their minds. Thus Caeſar and Alexander had uncommon ſucceſs in war, made extenſive conqueſts, and theſe with great rapidity. But even a ſuperficial reader will be ſenſible of the difference in their characters. Nicias and Craſſus were ſent on diſtant and dangerous expeditions, were both unſucceſsful, and ended their lives unhappily. But the character of the Greek, both as a man and as a citizen, is obviouſly ſuperior to that of the Roman. You will, however, ſometimes meet with a ſimilarity both of characters and of fortunes, as is remarkable in Sertorius and Eumenes.

LETTER

LETTER XXXII.

To Lælius.

YOU will remember, before you left us, we uſed to talk of the outlines of hiſtory as neceſſary, before venturing upon hiſtorical ſyſtems. I have ſeen many epitomes intended to pave the way for larger compilations; but theſe always appeared to me open to objections of one kind or other. Abridgements of univerſal hiſtory, however ſmall, muſt always be complicated, and are apt to convey to young minds confuſed ideas of chronological periods. But, having changed my own idea of the plan which I ſhowed you, I have no reaſon to complain of the defects to be found in thoſe of others. Outlines of univerſal hiſtory are not here meant, but only ſuch as, extending from the early ages of antiquity

to the preſent, might ſerve as a chronological directory for more complete hiſtories to be read afterwards. This would be divided into three great periods; the firſt containing antient hiſtory, which would conſiſt, if I may uſe the figure, of three parallel lines, that is, the progreſs of three ſtates which ſubſiſted at the ſame time, though the origin and termination of each of theſe ſtates fell in periods different from thoſe of the other two. Theſe were the Perſian, the Grecian, and Roman. There were, it is true, different ſtates in Greece; but Athens or Sparta had, for the moſt part, the lead; and the affairs of antient Greece are generally conſidered as making but one branch of hiſtory.

It is not meant that theſe outlines ſhould either include ſacred hiſtory, or ſhould aſcend ſo high as the fabulous times of any of the ſtates mentioned. The Perſian line would begin with Cyrus, and end with the overthrow of Darius Codomannus by Alexander;

ander; that of Greece would extend from Lycurgus, or perhaps from Solon, to the conqueſt of Macedonia by Paulus Æmilius; and the Roman from the foundation of the city to Conſtantine. This laſt would admit of three ſub-diviſions; the regal period, the conſular or republican, and the imperial. The ſecond great diviſion would extend from Conſtantine to Charles V.; and, being long, might likewiſe be ſubdivided into two parts; the former preceding, the other following the commencement of the reign of Charlemaigne. The reign of Charles V. with what follows, to the preſent time, would make the laſt great period.

Theſe hiſtorical lines, though ſlender, ought, nevertheleſs, to contain a connected chain of events; excepting the antient hiſtory, which would be interrupted on finiſhing the Perſian line, to re-aſcend to the commencement of the Grecian, and afterwards to that of the Roman ſtate.

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Were hiſtorical outlines, thus digeſted, to be read, and committed to the memory in the earlier periods of life, we ſhould never afterwards be bewildered in reading hiſtory. Thus, though the Egyptian and Carthaginian hiſtories be not comprehended in theſe outlines, we ſhould be able, in reading theſe hiſtories, to diſcover the coincidence of their different periods with thoſe of the Perſian, Grecian, or Roman hiſtorical chain.

Though theſe hiſtorical ſketches would make but a very ſmall volume, they would not be found equally intereſting in every part. The Perſian hiſtory is moſt attracting where it is interwoven with the affairs of Greece; and the moſt intereſting part of the Grecian hiſtory is from Solon to the death of Philopoemon. About this period, the political machinations of Philip having kindled animoſities among the different ſtates of Greece, they ſoon loſt their ſpirit of liberty, and fell victims to the Macedo-

nian power. The ſtates to be mentioned in the Grecian line, beſides the Athenian and Spartan, are the Theban, Corinthian, Achaean, and Macedonian. The period of the Roman line, which ſeems chiefly to attract the attention of readers is, from the beginning of the firſt Punic war to the end of the reign of Auguſtus. The deſcent of the barbarous nations from the north to the ſouthern parts of Europe, the Cruſades, the general decline of taſte, of the arts, and of polite literature, the ſophiſticated doctrines of the ſchools, with the legendary compilations of the monks, conſpired to render the middle ages diſagreeable and melancholy.

The events and tranſactions of later times being more frequently ſubjects of converſation than thoſe of former ages, render a particular attention to the third great period neceſſary. But, independent of this motive, the hiſtory of Europe ſince the beginning of the ſixteenth century, will be

be found more inviting than that of many ages before. A cloſer political intercourſe hath obtained among the different nations of Europe than had been known in the feudal times. This is ſo far ſupported by the reſidence of Ambaſſadors ſent from each ſtate to the reſt, and by other means, that Europe is inſenſibly become, in ſome reſpects, like one great kingdom, conſiſting of many members. So that if any ſtate attempt to raiſe itſelf at the expence of its neighbours, and thus to aſſume a ſuperior power, that ſtate will be in danger of oppoſition by a formidable combination of others. Whoever reads the hiſtory of France for a century back, will find the truth of this obſervation confirmed. A ſtate may, however, become formidable to its neighbours, by internal oeconomy alone; that is, by frugality, trade, manufactures, and the proper diſcipline of an army. Of this Pruſſia is the moſt ſtriking example in Europe at preſent; for no nation hath raiſed itſelf to ſo great a pitch of power in ſo

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ſhort a time; and that without the aſſiſtance of navigation. The preſervation of the balance of power in Europe would have been greatly facilitated, had not the project of Henry the Fourth of France, a project worthy of himſelf, been fruſtrated by the untimely death of that Prince. This was one general council, ſimilar to that of the Amphyctеons of Greece, to regulate the public concerns of the ſtates of Europe with one another, and to reſtrain each within its due limits.

LETTER XXXIII.

To Lælius.

AN incident, as unforeſeen as unimportant, prevented me from ſubjoining the few following obſervations to a former letter.

Taſte, in reading hiſtory, or in the acquiſition of hiſtorical knowledge, differs, in ſome reſpects, from taſte in hiſtorical compoſition. One who would inform himſelf thoroughly, whether in general hiſtory, or in that of any particular nation, will find it neceſſary to read ſuch hiſtories as convey a diſtinct detail of facts and events, ſo connected together, that each may appear the effect of a preceding, or the cauſe of a ſucceeding event. As truth is the great object here, the moſt elegant compoſitions

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are not always the moſt eligible for this acquiſition. Polybius, who was not ſo attentive to elegance as T. Livius, is, nevertheleſs, preferable to the latter for his inviolable attachment to truth.

The excellence of hiſtorical compoſition, next to abſolute truth, conſiſts chiefly in perſpicuity, ſimplicity, dignity, and elegance of ſtyle. The two former of theſe requiſites may be found without the two latter; but we cannot invert the obſervation. Without entering into a particular diſcuſſion of theſe, we will, perhaps, judge better of them by the examples of well known authors. Florus, T. Livius, Caeſar, Juſtin, and Suetonius, make a ſcale of authors, differing from one another, and yet each of them poſſeſſing one hiſtorical talent or another. Caeſar is here to be conſidered as the ſtandard; the two former affecting a more ſplendid and pompous manner, while the two latter are inferior in many reſpects.

Florus

Florus is turgid, hyperbolical, and figurative. By a ſolicitous affectation of pomp and magnificence, he loſes that dignity which he might have acquired, had he ſtudied plainneſs and ſimplicity. His periods, however, when conſidered ſingly, and not as making part of an hiſtory, are elegant. The Preſident Monteſquieu remarks the following paſſages of Florus, as ſingularly beautiful and expreſſive. The firſt is, " all the faults of Hannibal are compre- " hended in theſe words:" *Cum victoria poſſet uti, frui maluit* *. " He gives us an " idea of the whole Macedonian war when " he ſays," *introiſſe victoria fuit* †. " He " exhibits to us a ſtriking and ſublime view " of the whole life and exploits of Scipio, " when he ſpeaks thus concerning his " youth:" *Hic erat Scipio, qui in exitium Africae*

* When he could have availed himſelf of his victory, he choſe rather to indulge in the ſweets of it.

† His penetrating into the country was equal to victory.

Africae creſcit *. " He paints, in the moſt " lively colours, the reſtleſs ſpirit of Han- " nibal, the ſtate of nations, and the whole " grandeur of the Roman people, when he " ſays:" *Qui profugus ex Africa, hoſtem populo Romano toto orbe quaerebat* †.—— That theſe paſſages are elegant, will be readily allowed; but they are poetical elegancies, rather than conſiſtent with the chaſtity of hiſtorical compoſition. Let us ſuppoſe them inſerted in the Gaulic or civil wars of Caeſar, it will immediately appear how much they are beneath the dignity of that manly author.

T. Livius will ever yield much pleaſure to readers of taſte. His ſpeeches, his periods, and his deſcriptions, are evidently laboured to a high degree. In the laſt of theſe,

* This was the Scipio who grew up for the deſtruction of Africa.

† Who being an exile, ſearched through the known world for an enemy to the Roman people.

theſe, he indulges his imagination further than is becoming the hiſtorian, his credit being thus rendered doubtful; and, in the heat of compoſition, he carries his expreſſion and colouring, if not beyond nature, at leaſt ſometimes beyond truth. However juſtly we admire the art of this author, we would have admired it more, had that art been employed in conveying to his labours a more artleſs appearance. Juſtin ſeldom riſes above mediocrity; and, though he be not deficient either in perſpicuity or ſimplicity, he hath little claim to hiſtorical dignity. His manner is unequal; and his more elegant periods are believed to have been the words of Trogus Pompeyus. The late period in which he lived hath rendered the purity of his language ſuſpected by ſome of the beſt critics. The manner of Suetonius is low and mean, for the moſt part frigid and without animation. His language is a ſtriking example of what the Romans termed the *ſtilus tenuis*. His work is rather a collection of materials for hi-

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ſtory, than a regular hiſtorical compoſition. He is juſtly valued for veracity, and for conveying to us a variety of anecdotes not to be found in any other author now extant.

Caeſar, here conſtituted the ſtandard, is chaſte, nervous, unaffected, and every where ſhows that elegant negligence which never fails to pleaſe. In ſome paſſages we can diſcover marks of hurry; which, though food to the faſtidious and minute critic, hath no bad effect with a reader of taſte and of a liberal mind; ſince from this, it appears, that Caeſar compoſed without labour. Compoſitions in polite literature coincide with paintings in nothing more than in this circumſtance. An artiſt who paints with eaſe, freedom, and boldneſs, conveys to his figures a ſpirit and grace not to be found in thoſe which are the reſult of painful and laborious exertions. The elegancies of T. Livius, of Florus, and of Paterculus, are univerſally acknowledged. But

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the laboured periods of the firſt of theſe authors, and the brilliancies to be found in many of thoſe of the other two, will, it is preſumed, be leſs reliſhed by readers diſtinguiſhed for a chaſtity of taſte, than the dignified ſimplicity of Caeſar, or even than the bold and unaffected manner of Polybius. When an hiſtorian becomes a panegyriſt, he is apt, perhaps inſenſibly, to adopt a ſplendid ſtyle. Paterculus, notwithſtanding his merit, is open to a cenſure of this kind.

A well known modern author, who hath long entertained the public with his multifarious writings, and among others with hiſtory, hath been much applauded for his elegance, ariſing chiefly from eaſe and a ſeeming careleſſneſs. But this author, whether from levity, or from indulging a natural vein of ridicule and raillery, hath not always ſupported the chaſtity and dignity of the hiſtorian. His humour is of that kind which never fails to attract many juvenile admirers. But his elegancies will hardly

hardly be deemed by his graver readers a ſufficient compenſation for that deriſive and acrimonious ſpirit, not to ſay zeſt of miſanthrophy, which runs through the greater part of his compoſitions; in which, too, we might have expected more accuracy, had they been leſs voluminous. You will find, however, ſome of his hiſtories both agreeable and inſtructive. Such paſſages in theſe as appeared to me exceptionable, I ſhall point out to you afterwards.

The ſtyle of Salluſt and of Tacitus, being ſingular, theſe authors are not taken into the preceding ſcale. We have good reaſon to believe that Cicero, Caeſar, T. Livius, and other elegant authors of that age, did not approve of Salluſt's manner, ſince their own differs ſo widely from his. Some have admired the ſtyle of Salluſt as preferable to that of the other claſſical authors. It is not improbable, however, as Aſcham, a critic of the ſixteenth century, conjectures, that Salluſt's ſtyle was corrupt-

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ed by the company which he kept; for being himſelf of looſe and diſſolute manners, he would naturally aſſociate with thoſe of like diſpoſitions. It may be obſerved that the ſame cauſes produce the ſame effects in all ages. The youth of our own times, whoſe lives and manners are ſimilar to thoſe of Salluſt, affect not only a rapidity of ſpeech, but an abrupt, deſultory, and unconnected ſtyle of language. There is no antient author, whoſe manner it is more dangerous for a modern to imitate, than that of Salluſt; for the modern languages being burdened with particles, were we to endeavour to get rid of theſe, and, in imitation of Salluſt and Tacitus, to throw out the conjunctions, and to croud verbs together, our compoſitions would have more the appearance of the index of a book, or of a ſummary of its contents, than of periods properly conſtructed. Whether Tacitus was an imitator of Salluſt, or both theſe authors of Thucidides, may be doubted.

From

From the preceding five authors, we may form ſome judgment of the merits, defects, and improprieties of hiſtorical compoſition; and other authors may be brought to a proof of its kind, by comparing them with this climax.

LETTER XXXIV.

To Lælius.

GARDENING and architecture have been generally ranked among the arts. But I ſhould think the former ought, with no leſs propriety, to be claſſed among the works of nature, ſince gardening is nothing elſe but Nature dreſſed and ornamented by art.

There are few, if any objects of taſte, more intereſting than architecture; by which

which are not meant here the five well known orders only, but edifices of all kinds, and more particularly thoſe which we inhabit. Strength, conveniency, and elegance, are what chiefly conſtitute the propriety of buildings. What is the preciſe degree to which ornaments in architecture ought to be carried, is a problem, the ſolution of which hath teazed the moſt diſtinguiſhed artiſts. It hath been already obſerved, that Nature hath ornamented many animals ſo highly, that we wantonly conclude theſe decorations to be mere ſports. But the inſtinctive affections of animals are ſo far removed beyond our powers of inveſtigation, that deciſions relating to the deſign and utility of ſuch ornaments, ought not to be given without the utmoſt reſerve. Be that as it may, we are, in many caſes, profuſe in ornamenting, without regard to utility, believing ourſelves to be authoriſed in this, from the beſt examples, thoſe of Nature.

It is not an eaſy matter to know where to ſtop, when we inveſtigate the laws and analogies of Nature, when we take leſſons from her oeconomy, or when we apply theſe to the arts. Some architects have entertained an opinion, that the principles and ſymmetry of their art, are deducible from the proportions of the human body. In all the members of architecture, ſtrength or beauty are intended. As to the human body, beſides the endowments of ſtrength and beauty, Nature hath not only fitted it for much motion, but hath rendered exerciſe neceſſary for its preſervation and well-being. This neceſſity of abſolute reſt in the one, and of motion in the other, renders it probable, that, if there be any analogy at all between the proportions of the human body and thoſe of architecture, it muſt be ſo faint as to be unſatisfactory to a judicious artiſt. The arts, however, have been ſo much indebted to Nature, that ſhe ought invariably to be conſulted, when innovations in the arts are intended. In the

preſent

preſent caſe, it is not from the animal kingdom, or from bodies poſſeſſing an internal power of ſpontaneous motion, that we can take directions. The tops of trees are frequently ponderous and bulky, and are always ſupported by trunks of a ſtrength equal to their load. A ſtately oak, with a ſufficient length of trunk, tapering gently from the ground to the loweſt branchings, might well have led mankind, at firſt, to ſupport heavy piles of building by ſimilar columns. This is, at leaſt, as natural a ſuppoſition, as that the accidental growth of the Acanthus about a baſket, ſhould direct to the foliage of the Corinthian capital.

Since many of the ornamental parts which belong to the different orders of architecture neither contribute to the ſtrength of buildings, nor to conveniency, theſe decorations make part of the third branch, that is, of elegance; and we ſee in architecture, perhaps more than in any of the

other arts, an application of ornament, which, though wholly unconnected with utility, is univerſally allowed to prove an ample ſource of beauty. In ſuch caſes, it doth not appear that we can frame any definition of elegance more ſatisfactory than that certain proportions pleaſe the eye, as particular notes of muſic are melodious to the ear. Nor can we ever hope to inveſtigate the nervous ſyſtem ſo ſcientifically as to lay open theſe myſteries. We know that harſh ſounds, as ſcratching a plate with a knife, or rubbing one rough ſtone againſt another, are remarkably irkſome to ſome people; while others are in no ways affected with ſuch ſounds. The tumultuous din or gobling of a turkey cock ſeems to us to be quite contrary to true melody; and yet the female of that bird may, from a particular organization of nerves, find theſe notes enchanting muſic. The male ſwallow, while the female ſits on her eggs, flies about the building, ſilent every where till he come oppoſite to the neſt, where he

he ſets up a loud ſcreaming, harſh to us, and perhaps to the female turkey, though, for ought we know, ſo muſical and delightful to the female ſwallow, as to have a ſhare in ſolacing her during her tedious and painful period of incubation.

Another important queſtion in architecture is, whether the members of any or all the orders, can admit of conſiderable changes in their proportions, without violating architectory laws? The inveſtigation of this problem is the more difficult, that we have no other ſtandard for the proportions of theſe ornamental parts, which are in no reſpect conducive to the ſtrength or convenience of the building, but that internal ſenſe which we denominate taſte. Though the Romans adopted the Grecian architecture, it appears, from the remains of antient edifices in Rome, that they did not adhere rigidly to particular proportions. We may judge of this from the great Amphitheatre, the loweſt circle or ſtory of which

which hath been deſcribed by ſome of the moſt diſtinguiſhed architects as Doric, and by others as Tuſcan. The fourth or higheſt circle, too, hath equivocal members, ſo as to have paſſed with ſome as of the Compoſite, and with others as of the Corinthian order. It is to be regretted, that ſo little of the architecture of the Auguſtan period hath eſcaped the wrecks of time; ſince Vetruvius lived till about the beginning of Auguſtus's reign, and others who ſucceeded that architect, muſt probably have acquired a refined taſte in that art. The theatre of Marcellus, and the portico of the Rotunda, are fine ſpecimens, the one of the Doric, the other of the Corinthian order. But theſe, with ſome other more mutilated fragments of the Auguſtan age, are not ſufficient to let us know what latitude the maſters of that period aſſumed in varying their proportions. Be that as it may, the architects of the preſent times would perhaps do well to adhere religiouſly to the rules laid down by the more celebrated maſters,

ſters, who have appeared in Europe ſince the reſtoration of the fine arts. Exceſs in refinement is known ſometimes to have led to deformity, and ſeldom fails to preſage a decline from true taſte.

Horace, in Ode xv. B. 2. complains, that the Romans, in his time, were more attentive to private buildings than to the temples of the Gods. The ingenious authors of a late publication on architecture have animadverted on the poet for making ſuch a complaint, ſince Auguſtus himſelf had greatly ornamented the city with public edifices. I know it will not be diſagreeable to you, if I conclude this letter with an attempt to vindicate your favourite author. In this I am ſo little at a loſs, that I think the charge may be anſwered in three different ways. Firſt, when we conſider the good ſenſe and polite manners of that poet, his extenſive knowledge of mankind, his liberal education, and more particularly, his intimacy with the Emperor, we cannot perſuade

perſuade ourſelves that he would ſo far forget himſelf as to glance at the character of any perſon then high in power, much leſs that he would arraign the public conduct of Auguſtus.

It may be next obſerved, that we are uncertain whether the preſent arrangement of the Odes correſponds with the chronological order of their compoſition, and, conſequently, whether the Ode in queſtion might have been compoſed before Auguſtus had leiſure to attend to public buildings, which he had not till after the death of Anthony; and at that time Horace was thirty-four years of age. This poet, we have reaſon to believe, had diſtinguiſhed himſelf by his compoſitions when he was at Athens. Without a recommendation of this kind, it is not probable that Brutus would have at once raiſed a tax-gatherer's ſon to the rank of a military tribune. Horace was not introduced to Maecenas till two or three years after this; and yet the

firſt Ode, Satire, and Epiſtle are inſcribed to that ſtateſman. It is certain, that Horace's journey to Brunduſium was ſix, or perhaps ſeven years before the death of Anthony; and he then compoſed his fifth Satire. Either of theſe anſwers would ſuffice to an unprejudiſed mind. But the truth of the matter is as follows: Auguſtus, from his being firſt at the head of an army, was for many years involved in a continued ſucceſſion of dangerous wars. As ſoon as he had it in his power, and during the following part of his life, he ſpared no expence in decorating the city with public edifices, while his own houſe on Mount Palatine, and his villas, were conſtructed after a plain and ſimple manner, having furniture correſponding to the frugality of the buildings. By this moderation in his private expence, he meant to ſet an example to the richer citizens of Rome, whoſe extravagance in erecting ſuperb houſes in Rome, and all over Italy, and in ornamenting theſe, exceeded all bounds. This

private

private magnificence, and enormous expence, was productive of the worſt effects; for it not only incapacitated the citizens to contribute in rearing and ſupporting the temples, as had been the cuſtom of their anceſtors in the times of ſimplicity, but was an inducement to rob the provinces, as the proconſuls, and others bearing offices there, had it in their power. Horace, therefore, in this Ode, ſeconds the Emperor in his efforts to correct a dangerous vice; whilſt the poet, in a delicate manner, offers incenſe to him, in applauding his temperance and moderation in conducting his private affairs.

LETTER XXXV.

To Lælius.

IN entering upon this ſeries of letters, I gave you a definition of taſte, the moſt unexceptionable I could frame; and, at the ſame time, imparted to you ſeveral thoughts, which appeared to me preliminaries neceſſary for the elucidation of this delicate ſubject. I propoſed, at the ſame time, to communicate my ideas of the nature and objects of genius. But, as there are few, if any objects of taſte, which are not likewiſe, in one degree or other, objects of genius, I conſider myſelf as having, in a great meaſure, in the preceding letters, fulfilled my engagement relating to theſe two faculties of the mind. What ſeems ſtill wanting, is to examine the nature of genius, as diſtinguiſhed from taſte. The letters which ſhall follow this inquiry,

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though perhaps ſome of them have little or no relation to one another, will nevertheleſs, I flatter myſelf, be found not unworthy the attention of a juvenile reader.

It may be queſtioned, whether the preciſe limits between taſte and genius can be aſſigned. The internal ſenſes, powers, and faculties of the mind, have undergone ſo many diviſions, that it is perhaps impoſſible to define them, ſo that each ſhall be diſtinct from all the reſt. Thoſe which chiefly concern our preſent purpoſe are, perception, taſte, genius, judgment, and imagination. Upon opening our eyes, the mind is immediately impreſſed with the idea of light. This, and, in general, whatever firſt acts upon the mind, we term Perception. A perſon of taſte, upon firſt looking at an exquiſite piece of painting, is ſtruck with its excellence and beauty. Thus perception and taſte are concomitants; and the mind in both is wholly paſſive.

The

The power of invention, eſpecially when ſupported by an aptneſs to learn, may be conſidered as conſtituting what we underſtand by genius. We can hardly ſuppoſe genius to manifeſt itſelf without ſome operation or exertion of the mind; and the term *invention* itſelf carries the idea of activity along with it. If, then, the mind be paſſive, with reſpect to taſte, but active, in what relates to genius, the limits between the two may be diſtinctly marked. It is true, the mind may be ſaid to be active in its efforts to improve its taſte. But, when we conſider objects of taſte with this intention, the mind is no leſs paſſive in receiving the impreſſions of their various beauties, than in the former caſe; nor is it in our power to prevent ſuch impreſſions, more than we can avoid the perception of light upon opening our eyes.

That faculty of the mind by which it diſcriminates its ideas, or, by comparing them, diſcovers their agreements, their differences,

ferences, and relations to one another, and thereupon draws concluſions, may be denominated *judgment*. The imagination or fancy is to be conſidered as an handmaid to the genius and to the judgment. Being leſs reſtricted to a cloſe and rigorous examination and compariſon of analogous ideas, ſhe makes excentric aberrations, finds relations between ideas which ſeem to lie remote from one another; and in this, and various other ways, ſhe collects and preſents materials on which the genius and the judgment may operate. But, with whatever degree of accuracy we may endeavour to define theſe faculties, the mind is frequently occupied in ſuch a manner, that they ſeem to be blended together. A painter means to delineate Priam, Hecuba, Andromachy, and the other friends collected about the dead body of Hector, ſent by Achilles to Troy. The number of figures to be introduced, their arrangement, their attitudes, in ſhort, every circumſtance relating to compoſition, deſign, and expreſ-

ſion,

ſion, occupy, and are to be digeſted in the mind of the artiſt. It is evident, that the taſte, the genius, the judgment, and the imagination, are all at work here. But he would be a minute philoſopher, indeed, who, in this example, would undertake to trace, with preciſion, the reſpective departments of theſe faculties.

The developement of truths, particularly thoſe of a more abſtract kind, is the field in which genius and judgment chiefly exerciſe themſelves. Mathematical inquiries, phyſical inveſtigations, and the application of geometry to nature, and to many of the arts, particularly to mechanics, are the leading objects of genius. It may be obſerved, that genius is not always accompanied with taſte; but there is, perhaps, no example of a refined taſte without a conſiderable ſhare of genius. The works of Euclid, of Archimedes, of Newton, and of many others, diſcover great vigour of genius, but are not of that kind from which

which we can infer their authors to have been poſſeſſed of taſte. In ſome of the metaphyſical and ſcholaſtic compoſitions of the preceding centuries, we can ſee much acuteneſs of genius; but the preſent age conſiders them as void of taſte.

The fine arts, and polite literature, make the two great provinces of taſte. But taſte alone is inſufficient to procure a high character in either of theſe. The ſupport of a native genius, of a ſound judgment, or of a regular imagination, is requiſite; and, when we look back through the different ſeries of ages to the moſt remote antiquity, how few have appeared poſſeſſed of all theſe together, in an eminent degree?

Apparent nantes in vaſto gurgite rari.

LETTER

LETTER XXXVI.

To Hortensia.

THOUGH your reading, good Hortenſia, be more circumſcribed than that of many of your ſex in romance, in novels, in adventures, this deficiency I know to be more than balanced by your inquiries into the more important departments of morality, of hiſtory, of nature, and, I truſt, of a ſubject more elevated than any of theſe. Some time ago, when one read part of a treatiſe on ſtudy to the reſt of the company, the ſtyle was found ſo aukward, ſo vulgar, and, in ſome parts, ſo proverbial, as to provoke laughter, you obſerved, that however unacquainted the author might be with the propriety of language, he ſeemed to be no ſtranger to his ſubject. Your obſervation was, in my opinion, juſt; and I could

could ſee you had learned, like Virgil, with an antient Roman poet, to pick grains of gold from much duſt. Were we to reſtrict our reading to abſolute purity of language, we ſhould deprive ourſelves of ſome of the moſt diſtinguiſhed Engliſh authors, and, among the reſt, of your favourite Tillotſon; who, though an avowed reformer of the Engliſh language, though he every where diſcovers much good ſenſe, ſoundneſs of judgment, and ſtrength of argument, is, nevertheleſs, ſometimes incorrect in ſtyle. Dryden would likewiſe ſhare the fate of the condemned; and yet neither his proſe nor poetical compoſitions, notwithſtanding inaccuracies to be found in both, ought to be neglected by any Engliſh reader of taſte.

With reſpect to your obſervations relating to the merit of compoſitions, independent of the language, I ſhall give you the authority of an author of undoubted taſte and judgment. You know the name, though

though you never have read the works of Ariſtotle. This philoſopher, in arranging the conſtituent parts of tragedy, introduces diction the laſt, as the leaſt important; conſidering the plot, the manners, and the ſentiments, as the moſt eſſential qualities of dramatical compoſition; and yet no authors were more attentive to, or knew the value of language and ſtyle better, than thoſe of Greece. I doubt not, but according to the taſte of our own times, improprieties in language alone would ſuffice, with many people, to condemn compoſitions, though excellent in other reſpects; and yet Ariſtotle, as well as other judicious critics, would not fail to conſider this reprobation as a certain evidence of a defect, both of judgment and of taſte.

I ſhall give you the ſentiments of another diſtinguiſhed critic in ſupport of what I preſume to be your own. I readily allow, ſays Longinus, that writers of a lofty and towering genius are by no means pure and

correct, ſince, whatever is neat and accurate throughout, muſt be exceedingly liable to flatneſs. For my part, ſays the author, I have taken notice of no inconſiderable number of faults in Homer, and ſome other of the greateſt authors, and cannot, by any means, be blind or partial to them. Apollonius, author of the Argonautics, ſays he, was a writer without a blemiſh; but who would chooſe to be Apollonius rather than Homer?

The preſent age, though fruitful in excellent compoſitions of all kinds, hath furniſhed us with ſome of a complexion different from thoſe of high merit, though accompanied with faults. In theſe here meant, we are entertained with language unexceptionable, perhaps elegant; but when, after a peruſal, we come to caſt up our profit and loſs, we find we have been feeding on air. It would be dangerous here to produce examples. One of your goodneſs and humanity will not expect, that a mind, peaceably diſpoſed, ſhould

ſhould wantonly lay itſelf open to the gall of provoked and vindictive pens. While I avoid examples, I remain in tranquillity; for where is the author ſo inſenſible to vanity as to believe his compoſitions neither to contain inſtruction nor amuſement?

Style hath undergone a great variety of diviſions, ſuch as the nervous, the feeble, the diffuſe, the conciſe, the neat, the florid, the vehement, the flaſhy, the ſimple, and perhaps many more. Even theſe will admit of diviſions, as they are found qualified by others. Thus, ſimplicity may be connected with majeſty, dignity, mediocrity, or meanneſs. All the diviſions of ſtyle merit well the attention of thoſe whoſe buſineſs leads them to public ſpeaking, whether at the bar, in the pulpit, or in popular aſſemblies of whatever kind. But, when one's reading doth not extend to the learned ſciences, it will be unneceſſary to ſtudy the nature and properties of ſtyle ſo minutely. The reading of your ſex conſiſts,

ſiſts, for the moſt part, in polite literature, and it hath been deemed as improper, that you ſhould fatigue your minds in the painful inveſtigations of abſtract and metaphyſical compoſitions, as your bodies in athletic exerciſes. The kinds of ſtyle, therefore, that I would recommend to your attention, are four; and may be marked by the departments to which they are reſpectively deſtined. Theſe are the hiſtorical, the epiſtolary, the declamatory, and the rhetorical.

The moſt indiſpenſible requiſite in all kinds of ſtyle is perſpicuity; and this depends chiefly on digeſting the ſubject thoroughly in the mind before committing it to writing; on a ſelection of words the moſt appoſite to the ſubject; on a proper arrangement of theſe words; on periods of a due length; and on connecting the parts ſo together, that the following may flow naturally from the preceding. Hiſtorical ſtyle ought to be chaſte, nervous, unaffected,

ted, animated, grave, dignified, and little, if at all, ornamented. Though hiſtorical compoſitions may be found poſſeſſed of all theſe properties, there are, perhaps, no two hiſtories ſo ſimilar in ſtyle as not to diſcover ſomething characteriſtic of their reſpective authors.

As ſubjects of every kind may be committed to letters, epiſtolary ſtyle is therefore more various than any other. When we write to perſons of a rank much ſuperior to our own, and to whom we are little known, the ſtyle of our letters ought to be a-kin to that of hiſtory, juſt mentioned. We ought, indeed, to abate of dignity, and to aſſume a language which may, though without meanneſs, be expreſſive of the difference of rank. Again, when we write to one of inferior rank, ſuppoſe to a villager, or a ſervant, we will do well to accommodate our ſtyle to the dialect of our correſpondent. Thus, it appears how greatly the ſtyle of letters ought

to be varied, ſince the rank of our correſpondents, the degree of our acquaintance, and the nature of our buſineſs with them, conſpire to affect, and ought to regulate it. But what is commonly underſtood by epiſtolary ſtyle, is that of letters in which we pour out our minds, without reſerve, to our familiar friends. When letters are intended for the public, they are generally in a ſtyle more formal, and more highly poliſhed, than thoſe which are not meant to be ſeen by any but our particular friends, of which an eaſy and negligent, though elegant compoſition, make the chief merit. Of this we may judge from the Epiſtles of Cicero, compared with thoſe of Pliny. In the former we are pleaſed with the freedom, eaſe, and, ſometimes, careleſſneſs of the compoſition; while the latter, though elegant, bear the marks of labour, as intended for the public. This difference appears, even in the tranſlations of Mr Melmoth, which I know you have read.

I ſhould do injuſtice to your ſex, did I neglect to remark here your powers in this kind of compoſition. I have ſeen letters from Ladies, and am in poſſeſſion of ſome, of which I ſhould reckon it my honour to have been the author. A command, and propriety of language, ingenious ſentiments, animated obſervations, juſt and natural reflections, elegant eaſe and unaffected negligence, mark them the offspring of genuine taſte. I have ſeen other letters from younger female hands, which, though perhaps containing, here and there, a grammatical inaccuracy, ſufficient to make a ſour pedagogue knit his brows, gave evidence, nevertheleſs, of growing taſte and genius. Your acquaintance with Sevigné, Lambert, Maintenon, and the other celebrated French Ladies, renders it unneceſſary to particularize them.

Declamatory ſtyle extends from that of the ſimpleſt narrative to the higheſt degree of the pathetic. As it operates on the mind by

by the means of the paſſions, tropes, figures, ſimiles, hyperboles, and whatever elſe can ſerve the purpoſe of perſuaſion, are admitted indiſcriminately. Rhetorical ſtyle differs from that of declamation, in being more cloſe, ſententious, and better ſuited to convince by the force of argument. I ſhall not contend whether this kind ought to be denominated rhetorical, oratorial, or argumentative; for all theſe deſignations have been beſtowed upon it by different authors. It ſufficeth to know, that it is directed to the judgment. A ſpeaker, who would command the minds of his audience, having availed himſelf of his arguments, and of the correſponding ſtyle, will find his account in paſſing from the judgment to the paſſions, by veering inſenſibly to declamation.

Beſides theſe four kinds of ſtyle, there remains a fifth, perhaps too common in proſe compoſitions, that is, the poetical. But as a ſtandard of this kind, and for the proper

proper application of it, I refer you to a volume with which you are well acquainted, both in the original and by tranſlation, I mean Fenelon's Telemachus.

LETTER XXXVII.

To Lælius.

IT is as improper that a gentleman, who pretends to taſte and genius, be wholly ignorant of the philoſophy of the Greek ſchools, as it is unneceſſary that he be minutely acquainted with the various phyſical and moral ſyſtems of their different ſects. I ſhould think it ſufficient to have a general idea of the progreſs of philoſophy in Greece, and next to inquire into ſuch moral principles as were chiefly followed in former ages, and have been ſubjects of inveſtigation in the preſent. The period of philoſophy we ſhall ſuppoſe to have be-

gun with Pythagoras, and to have ended with Carneades. It is true, there were philoſophers in Greece before Pythagoras; and ſchools of philoſophy were continued long after the days of Carneades. But the doctrines of the former are uncertain; and thoſe of the latter Greek ſchools coincided with what had been taught at one time or other before.

This philoſophical aera includes a period of four hundred years, and ſomething more; for the time in which Pythagoras flouriſhed is not well aſcertained. The moſt probable opinion is, that he died not long before the expulſion of the Tarquins from Rome. Having travelled into Egypt, Phoenicia, and, as ſome ſay, into Chaldea, he returned to Samos, his native country; and from that, after a ſhort ſtay, he went to Crotona, where he founded the Italic ſchool.

It is to be regretted that the doctrines of Pythagoras are ſo little known. He taught

taught the exiſtence of one ſupreme intelligent cauſe, on which the material world depends; that the perfection of man conſiſts in virtue; and that ſouls migrate either among animals of the ſame ſpecies, or from one ſpecies to another. He is ſaid to have adopted this laſt opinion from the Egyptian prieſts. Others ſuppoſe him to have travelled to Bactria, and to have been a diſciple of Zoroaſter. If he was in that country, he might have heard of the metempſychoſis among the Gymnoſophiſts there, or he might even have learned it from thoſe of the ſame ſect who inhabited that part of Ethiopia which lay next to Memphis, and was at no great diſtance from that city. But it doth not appear that the other philoſophers who travelled to Egypt for the ſake of knowledge, entertained any ſuch ſentiment. I have been diſpoſed to think, that Pythagoras, from a humanity of mind, or from tender feelings, meant no more by this doctrine, than to correct or moderate the cruelties of man to the inferior animals,

which

which hath, in all ages, been unbounded and mercileſs.

The Italic ſchool flouriſhed about two centuries. The philoſophers in it, of greateſt diſtinction, were, Empedocles, Timaeus, Archytas, Philolaus, and Eudoxus. This ſchool made greater advances in the knowledge of the ſyſtem of the world than any of the following. What is told of Pythagoras, relating to the harmony of the ſpheres, their correſpondence with certain numbers, and with muſic, hath been conſidered as wholly unintelligible, and an affectation of myſtical knowledge ſuperior to the reſt of mankind. It is now aſcertained that the proportion of the gravity of two or more planets to their reſpective diſtances from the ſun, is the ſame with that of the forces neceſſary for the extenſion of two or more muſical chords, of unequal lengths, in order to render them uniſons. This might, with propriety, be termed the harmony of the ſpheres. If, then, Pythagoras taught this

this relation which obtains between the planets and muſical chords, he muſt have acquired a more intimate acquaintance with the oeconomy of our ſolar ſyſtem than hath generally been believed in later times.

The followers of this philoſopher taught likewiſe the diurnal and annual motion of the earth. If to theſe diſcoveries we add the credit to which geometry had ariſen in the Italic ſchool, it is evident that natural philoſophy muſt then have been in a flouriſhing ſtate. But this knowledge was ſoon loſt, and ſeems to have been ſwallowed up in the atomical ſyſtems of Democritus and Epicurus. The writings of Plato and of Ariſtotle diſcover nothing ſatisfactory relating to the order of the ſyſtem of the world, which is ſurpriſing, ſince Plato was ſome time a diſciple of Archytas, and probably at the ſame time with Philolaus. This can only be accounted for, from the difficulty which man finds in believing a body of ſo great ſeeming ſtability as the earth to be moveable.

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The Eleatic ſchool ſucceeded that of Pythagoras. It had its name from Elea or Velea, a town in that part of Italy called Great Greece, Parmenides, one of the firſt of this ſect, being born in this city, as were likewiſe Leucippus and Zeno, not the father of the Stoics. Some of the leading philoſophers of this ſchool, obſerving our ſenſes to convey to the mind uncertain or fallacious ideas of Nature, gave themſelves up to dialectic and metaphyſical diſputations, relinquiſhing phyſical inveſtigations and experiments.

Heraclitus of Epheſus was the founder of a ſect. He wholly reprobated the information of the bodily ſenſes in philoſophy; he conſidered fire as the ſoul of the world, and principle of all things. Being of an atrabilarian temperament, he was ſplenitic, ſought retirement, and affected obſcurity in teaching; whence he was called the dark philoſopher.

Thales

Thales of Miletus, whoſe character, as a worthy citizen, and an able politician, is no leſs than his fame as an acute and ingenious philoſopher, founded the Ionic ſchool. He is ſaid to have been the firſt who reduced philoſophy to a ſyſtem, and to have deduced truths from undeniable principles. We are, however, uncertain of the doctrines of this ſect. Its followers, we are told, devoted themſelves much to the inveſtigations of Nature, and hence, by way of diſtinction, were called Phyſicians. If Thales foretold an eclipſe of the ſun, as antiquity informs us, he muſt have made conſiderable advances in aſtronomy. Thales lived before Pythagoras, and is here mentioned only as the founder of a ſchool of philoſophy, his hiſtory being very uncertain, or rather checquered with fables.

Anaxagoras, of this ſchool, was the firſt, excepting perhaps Pythagoras, who taught the exiſtence of one univerſal intelligent cauſe, as a ſpirit wholly diſtinct from matter: For

For the firſt principle or deity of the other philoſophers who had lived before him was either ſome one or other of the elements, or ſo connected with, and immerſed in matter, as to be inſeparable from it. But ſo difficult is it wholly to diveſt our minds of the ideas of matter, that Anaxagoras ſometimes, in talking of his *Nous*, or univerſal mind, had recourſe to aerial or aetherial ſubſtances, which made Socrates ſay he had been diſappointed in the doctrines of this philoſopher. Anaxagoras had a ſchool at Athens. He ſeems to have wholly given up polytheiſm; and, being impriſoned by the Athenians on account of his doctrines, was with difficulty ſaved by Pericles.

Diogenes, Zeno, and Pyrrho, were reſpectively at the head of the Cynics, of the Stoics, and of the Sceptics. The philoſophy of Zeno conſiſted chiefly in a refinement of the rude and ſordid manners adopted by the Cynics, who ſeem to have copied

copied their mode of life from the inſtinctive purſuits of the inferior animals. Pyrrho, a painter, attached himſelf to, and contracted an intimacy with Anaxarchus, whom he attended to India. There he ſtudied the doctrines of the Magi and Gymnoſophiſts. But, finding nothing ſatisfactory either in theſe, or in the different and frequently oppoſite opinions of the Greek philoſophers, he gave himſelf wholly up to ſcepticiſm. His firſt principle in philoſophy was to doubt of every thing, and to decide of nothing. He brought himſelf to ſo great a pitch of apathy, that he ſet at defiance thoſe very paſſions which Nature hath intended as inſtruments to actuate the human mind.

Epicurus, in oppoſition to the three preceding ſects, taught that human felicity conſiſts in pleaſure. He gave more credit to the information of our ſenſes, as well as to reaſon, than the ſceptics, and ſome other of the ſchools, would allow. The

oppoſition of one ſect to another, and the differences of ſentiments in the ſame ſchools, had degenerated into mere ſophiſtry when Socrates appeared, by whoſe ſound, plain, and ſimple doctrines, philoſophy underwent a remarkable change in Greece. His opinions, his manner of teaching, and his method of ſilencing the ſophiſts, have been conveyed to us by Plato and Xenophon.

The Academies appear after Socrates. The firſt of theſe, known by the name of the Old Academy, retained the doctrines of Socrates and of Plato. Speuſippus, the ſcholar of the two former, was the founder of this academy, though it may be more properly ſaid to have originated from his two maſters. In it the poſitive precepts of morality were taught. But the innovations of Arceſilaus gave riſe to the middle academy. He taught, that, as truth lies beyond our reach, we ought never to draw concluſions from any argument, but conſtantly to ſuſpend our judgment. This he

pretended

pretended to be the reſtoration of the Socratic doctrine, and method of teaching. He ſeems to have miſtaken Socrates; for this philoſopher, in order to convince or humble the Sophiſts, uſed to argue by queſtion and anſwer; and thus having led them into abſurdities, he left them to draw concluſions as they pleaſed. But we have no reaſon to believe that Socrates was, in any degree, addicted to ſcepticiſm.

The third academy was founded by Carneades, who ſeems to have only ſoftened the doctrines of Arceſilaus; for, though he allowed truth to lie beyond our reach, he taught that man is able to diſcover degrees of probability ſufficient for the regulation of his actions.

Ariſtotle of Stagyra was the ſcholar, and afterwards the rival of Plato. Having had Alexander eight years under his tutory, he came to Athens, founded the Peripatetic ſchool, and taught in the Lycaeum. He

differed

differed widely in many of his opinions from his maſter. His works, which have reached us, prove him to have been poſſeſſed of a ſound and penetrating judgment. His ideas of the ſyſtem of the world were very erroneous. He taught, that the heavens conſiſt of an incorruptible matter, and have a diurnal rotation about the earth, as a centre. He wrote expreſsly againſt the doctrines of the Italic ſchool, relating to this ſubject; and, having acquired much reputation, he probably brought the ſounder phyſiology of Pythagoras and Philolaus into diſcredit. In ſo far he may be conſidered as the Des Cartes of the antients; and, had a Newton ſucceeded Ariſtotle, he would probably have reſtored and improved the doctrines of Pythagoras and his followers, as he did thoſe of Copernicus, notwithſtanding the high credit of Des Cartes.

It may ſeem ſurpriſing, when philoſophers had made ſo great progreſs in the knowledge of our ſolar ſyſtem, that one

of

of Ariſtotle's ſagacity and penetration ſhould have ſet himſelf in oppoſition to theſe diſcoveries, when he had nothing to ſubſtitute in their place, but what muſt always be conſidered by grave phyſiologiſts as puerile and abſurd. The caſe ſeems to be, that, in thoſe times, it was held highly honourable for a philoſopher to be at the head of a ſect, and to have many followers. Hence they became jealous of one another; and each thought it neceſſary to ſhow to their followers wherein the other ſects were defective or inconſiſtent. The Italic ſchool had, before Ariſtotle's time, acquired a high reputation. This philoſopher, therefore, would be led to ſhow to his followers wherein the doctrines of the other ſchools, and particularly of the Pythagorean, were unaccountable.

Notwithſtanding the advances that Philolaus, Eudoxus, and ſome of the better informed of that ſchool, had made in the ſyſtem of the world, there were ſtill ſome

circumſtances

circumſtances perhaps remaining doubtful, and to which they could not give a ready anſwer. They did not make a ſufficient allowance for the vaſt diſtance of the fixed ſtars from our ſyſtem. If they believed them all at an equal diſtance from the ſun, Ariſtotle would naturally aſk, why do not theſe ſtars appear larger or ſmaller, as the earth, in its orbit, is nearer, or at a greater diſtance from them, in the different periods of the year? But, if they believed the diſtances of the fixed ſtars from the ſun to be different, then would the queſtion return with equal force, Why do not theſe diſtances ſeem to vary as the earth moves in its orbit?

Theſe difficulties would be repreſented by Ariſtotle as ſufficient to conſider the doctrines of the Italic ſchool, relating to the ſyſtem of the world, as wholly unaccountable. Thus was the true philoſophy of Nature, as far as it concerns our ſolar ſyſtem, and as it was taught by Pythagoras

and his followers, buried for near two thouſand years, and the incorruptibility of the heavens, with their diurnal rotation round our earth, as a centre, ſubſtituted in its room.

The works of Plato and of Ariſtotle are almoſt the only remains of the Greek philoſophers which have reached our times. As theſe two philoſophers differ from one another in many of their ſentiments, they are ſtill more different in their manner. Plato's ideas are ſublime; but he is frequently obſcure, not purſuing his ſubjects with that connection which is indiſpenſible for perſpicuity. He likewiſe hath too often recourſe to figures and allegories; and ſome of his ſentiments are ſo maſked under theſe, as to have eluded the penetration of all his commentators. He is believed to have contracted this manner from the college of Memphis. His ſtyle is bold, elevated, and melodious. Hence many of the Romans are ſaid to have read his works with

with no other view than to improve their rhetoric, an object of great importance at Rome.

Ariſtotle's manner is conciſe and ſententious. He is, however, frequently abſtract and metaphyſical; and ſometimes ſo abrupt, as to leave his readers to make out his meaning by their own conjectures. Hence it requires great attention to ſtudy ſome parts of his works, without loſing ſight of his argument. The leaſt ſatisfactory branch of the philoſophy of theſe two authors is their phyſics. Their morals do not greatly differ. Thoſe of Plato are to be gleaned from the different parts of his works. Ariſtotle hath treated ethics under a diſtinct head.

There were ſtill two ſchools in Greece, the Cyrenaic and the Megaric. The former was founded by Ariſtippus, a ſcholar of Socrates. His attachment to pleaſure, and to the company of thoſe of ſuperior rank,

rank, was condemned by his maſter. The opinions and manners of the Megaric ſect bordered on thoſe of the Cynics. Euclid, the well known author of the Elements of Geometry, was of this ſchool.

In theſe few obſervations, the origin and courſe of the ſchools, and the philoſophers belonging to each, claiming our notice more than the accurate chronology of particular lives, the latter is not attended to with great preciſion.

LETTER XXXVIII.

TO LÆLIUS.

I HERE purſue the ſubject of my former letter. Having acquired a general notion of the progreſs of philoſophy in Greece, the next ſtep is to inquire into thoſe doctrines which are moſt diſtinct from one another, which have been, more than any of the reſt, ſubjects of ſpeculation in ſucceeding ages, and which many have adopted as the ground-work of their moral conduct.

The Greek philoſophers were, in general, good moraliſts; and, if we except a few, their moral principles, ſo far as they affected ſocial life, did not greatly differ from one another. The doctrines which chiefly diſtinguiſhed the ſeveral ſchools, were the methods of inveſtigating truth, the extent

extent of human underſtanding, the credit due to our ſenſes, phyſical cauſes and effects, and the oeconomy of the material world. In this laſt, they were ſo remote from truth, that their opinions, excepting thoſe of the Pythagorean ſchool, merit no attention. The moral doctrines beſt ſuited to our preſent inquiry, are thoſe of Epicurus, of Zeno, and of Socrates. It is only the leading moral principles of theſe philoſophers that are meant to be mentioned in this and in a following letter or two; for, from theſe principles, circumſtances of leſs importance in the moral conduct of life being readily deducible, may be conſidered as branches riſing from a ſtock.

Epicurus hath been conſidered as never having attended a ſchool of philoſophy; though, at fourteen years of age, he ſtudied a ſhort time under Pamphilus at Samos, but never had a maſter afterwards. When about thirty-ſix years of age, he opened a ſchool at Athens, where he taught

in

in a large garden. Among all the antient philoſophers, there are none whoſe moral doctrines have been more miſunderſtood by the generality of the moderns than thoſe of Epicurus. It would be unjuſt to eſtimate his morals from thoſe of his followers. Pleaſure ſeems to be an unhappy term to expreſs a leading philoſophical principle. But the pleaſure of Epicurus, however miſinterpreted afterwards, was really moral virtue, ſince by it he meant ſuch a regulation of the paſſions and appetites as tended to preſerve an internal tranquillity of mind, and to fit one for ſocial life. Of two perſons let one, by a proper regulation of the paſſions of the mind, and a temperate indulgence of the natural appetites, reach the age of ninety or an hundred years; while the other, by exceſſes in ſenſuality, becomes old, and dies at forty or fifty: The former of theſe is the Epicurean, according to the moral doctrines and practice of Epicurus himſelf. Believing the ſoul of man to be the moſt refined parts of matter, he taught,

that

that the ſureſt method to preſerve it in a pure ſtate, was a conſtant attention to temperance, and that thus a proper regulation of the paſſions becomes leſs difficult.

Epicurus did not allow his diſciples to throw their effects into a common ſtock, as was the cuſtom with ſome of the other ſects; but enjoined them, according to their greater abilities, to aſſiſt one another, which, during his own life, was religiouſly obſerved. He was ſo humane, that he treated his ſlaves as if they had been his children. He aſſiſted them in the labours of his garden; and, as he obſerved any of them inclined to hear his lectures, he admitted them as ſcholars. He was remarkably temperate, living chiefly on milk and the fruits of his garden. He had great numbers of ſcholars from Aſia, and all parts of Greece; was greatly careſſed by the Athenians, his natural benevolence and humanity procuring him the eſteem and affection of all who knew him.

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Notwithſtanding the mildneſs of Epicurus's manners, he laboured under a weakneſs unbecoming a philoſopher. He could not well tolerate thoſe who called his philoſophical principles in queſtion; inſomuch that he diſcovered a degree of malevolence to ſome of his own connections, who had expreſſed their diſapprobation of ſome parts of his doctrines. This jealouſy of oppoſition might, perhaps, proceed from his never having ſtudied in a ſchool of philoſophy; a circumſtance of which he uſed to boaſt, and which Cicero, after reading his works, obſerves, any one might have diſcovered, though he had not told it.

The Stoics ſet themſelves in oppoſition to the Epicurean ſect; which, in its turn, conſidering them as adverſaries, held them and their doctrines in contempt. This was productive of bad effects among ſome of the ſcholars of Epicurus, eſpecially after his death; for, that their moral conduct might be as oppoſite as poſſible to that of the

the Stoics, and being, at the ſame time, ſtimulated by the pruriency of youthful paſſions, they gave themſelves up to voluptuouſneſs and ſenſuality. Immoderate indulgences in theſe, in following ages, being held characteriſtics of an Epicurean, and a degeneracy from the moral principles and virtuous manners of their founder, brought the whole ſect into diſcredit. The Epicureans devoted themſelves to eaſe and indolence, avoiding every thing that can create ſolicitude in the mind. Hence they were reputed drones in ſociety. But thoſe of the ſect, whoſe lives were ſuch as that of Epicurus, might anſwer readily, that, were others to follow the example of their founder, tumultuous diſorders among mankind would be at an end; nor would ſocial compacts for mutual defence, penal and coercive laws, or political machinations, be any longer neceſſary.

Epicurus embraced the atomical ſyſtem of Democritus: But, as he was, in every ſenſe,

ſenſe, a materialiſt, he did not animate his atoms, nor give a ſoul to the world, as Democritus had done. His phyſical ſentiments are to be found in the poem of Lucretius, the elegance and originality of which will ever recommend it to readers of taſte, independent of the doctrines contained in it.

The theology of Epicurus hath always been held among the moſt abſurd of his opinions. He even compoſed his Gods of his atoms; taught that their habitations were far beyond all the worlds; that they lived in a ſtate of abſolute tranquility, and that they did not concern themſelves with human affairs. Theſe ideas are unphiloſophical, puerile, and unworthy of a philoſopher whoſe morality was ſo correct as that of Epicurus. I ſhall, therefore, take the ſame liberty here, as I have done on different occaſions, in my former letters, to offer a conjectural apology for a theology ſo extravagant.

Epicurus

Epicurus knew well the danger into which Anaxagoras had been brought by his theological ſentiments, which ſuperſeded polytheiſm, then in vogue. Epicurus, therefore, that he might ſecure himſelf, by preſerving his peace with the people, gave them Gods, but took care to remove them out of the way, that their agency might, in no reſpect, interfere with his doctrine of materialiſm.

I ſhall finiſh this letter, by obſerving, that, had Epicurus, and his contemporary philoſophers, lived a century and an half earlier, that is, about the age of Solon, or before it, his doctrines, though recommended by the purity of his manners, would not have been ſo well received in Athens; nor would his immediate followers have been ſo ſucceſsful in their oppoſition to the Stoics, Academics, and others, whoſe manners were more correct than their own. The period in which he flouriſhed was the moſt favourable for the propagation of his

principles. Luxury was then far advanced among the richer families. The citizens were addicted to caballing. A general corruption of manners began to prevail; and the youth, tired of the rigid maxims of Socrates and Zeno, received the new doctrines of Epicurus with avidity. They were taught, that the chief good and happineſs of man conſiſt in pleaſure. But, though they had, in their maſter, the example of a ſtrict moral conduct, and of an accurate regulation of the paſſions; they ſoon learned to generalize the original principle far beyond the limits within which Epicurus meant to confine it.

It is to be wiſhed, that the ſtate of things with ourſelves at preſent, were leſs ſimilar to that of Athens in the days of Epicurus. In a rich and populous ſtate, when diſſolute manners begin to obtain, it is not the youth alone who are willing to adopt principles tending to relax, if not to diſſolve, the obligations of religion and morality; and

which

which prove equally an opiate to the mind, and a ſanction to the manners, whether theſe principles come under the denomination of Epicurean, Scepticiſm, or whatever elſe. It were well for us to conſider the Athenians of that period, rather as a beacon to be avoided, than as a pattern to be imitated; leſt we, like them, degenerating from the more ſimple manners and independent ſpirit of our anceſtors, fall a prey to neighbours, to whom we uſed to give laws.

LETTER

LETTER XXXIX.

To Lælius.

WERE an Epicurean and a Stoic, living in the ſame ſociety, to regulate their moral conduct according to that of their maſters, though both would be entirely virtuous, eſpecially in relative duties, they would, nevertheleſs, differ widely in their manners. The openneſs and ductility of mind in the Epicurean, accommodating himſelf to the various humours of mankind, would ſtand in oppoſition to the ſeverity of the Stoic. The former would indulge in innocent pleaſures of all kinds; the other, conſidering them as tending to corrupt the human mind, would ſollicitouſly, perhaps oſtentatiouſly, avoid them. The Epicurean would ſympathiſe with others in their misfortunes and miſeries; the

Stoic

Stoic, holding virtue as ſuperior to all misfortunes, would neither feel for himſelf, nor for others in ſuch circumſtances.

Zeno, born at Citium, in Cyprus, having ſtudied under Crates the Cynic, and afterwards under Stilpo, opened a ſchool at Athens, when near ſixty years of age, and taught in a portico, which gave the denomination of Stoics to the ſect. The principles of Zeno's morality were, to live according to nature and reaſon; that virtue is its own reward; and that a man, abſolutely virtuous, ought not only to remain unaffected with misfortunes, but ought to be inſenſible to bodily pain in whatever degree. In conſequence of theſe, and ſimilar doctrines, the lives of the Stoics were ſimple and auſtere.

The manners of the firſt proſelytes to Chriſtianity coincided, in ſome reſpects, with thoſe of the Stoics. Both had their effects in common; were patient under ſufferings;

ſufferings; were enemies to thoſe pleaſures which enervate, and much more to thoſe which corrupt and debaſe the human mind; and both were remarkably attached to thoſe of their reſpective ſects. Hence ſome would make the moral principles of both to be the ſame, or nearly ſo. But this is far from being the caſe. The baſis of Chriſtian morality is univerſal benevolence. The Stoics conſidered the human mind as depending on itſelf for felicity. They likewiſe aſcribed a greater power to reaſon in the government of the paſſions, and in fortifying the mind againſt natural evils, than it is found to poſſeſs. But Chriſtianity conſiders man as a ſocial being, and makes morality and the felicity reſulting from moral actions, to conſiſt chiefly in the exertion of a ſocial principle. The apathy and Cyniſm of the Stoic are widely different from the benevolent principles of the Chriſtian. The former is, at beſt, a negative virtue, and would baniſh the ſenſations which are intended to humanize the mind,

and

and render it ſuſceptible of ſympathy. By the latter every member of ſociety is, or ought to be ſtimulated to promote the good of the whole, from a principle, which, as Chriſtian doctrines teach, was originally inſtinctive. A ſociety of Stoics might exiſt without miſery, or feeling the effects of natural evil; but a ſociety of Chriſtians could not exiſt without much poſitive happineſs, provided it were in the power of both to live according to their moral principles. The human mind, however cultivated by philoſophy, is unable to diveſt itſelf of feelings for the ſufferings of others, as the Stoics would make us believe. But, by cultivation, the mind naturally tends to that moral principle, which, more than any other, proves a firm bond of ſociety; and which, if univerſal and inſtinctive, would ſuperſede the neceſſity of human inſtitutions. Be this as it may, we have it well aſcertained from hiſtory, that, of all the ſects of philoſophers, none were more rigid moraliſts

ſaliſts than the antient Stoics and primitive Chriſtians.

The excellency of the Stoical doctrines conſiſted chiefly in their morality; nor is it an eaſy matter to aſcertain what were their phyſical and theological principles. Their authors frequently mention God as the intelligent cauſe and ſupporter of all things; at other times they ſeem to underſtand nothing more by this than an elementary fire which pervades all nature, and is the ſoul of the world. They conſidered the ſoul of man as a portion of this univerſal principle, into which, as ſome of their ſect taught, the human ſoul is reſorbed at death. Others ſuppoſed the ſoul to remain diſtinct from the body till the general conflagration, when all things will be renewed, an opinion which they likewiſe maintained. They believed in a Providence, though ſome of their authors ſpeak of fate as irreſiſtible. But by this it would appear, they meant no more than the will of the Deity,

Deity, whom they muſt have conſidered as under a moral neceſſity of doing what is beſt.

The Stoics were in a conſtant ſtate of enmity with the Epicureans; and they differed from them in nothing more than in the doctrine of a Providence; for the Epicureans were profeſſed fataliſts. In general, theſe two ſects ſtood more in oppoſition to one another, than any other two in Greece, excepting the Cyrenaic and the Cynic; the former of which was ſoon abſorbed in the Epicurean ſect, the latter in that of the Stoics. It is not ſurpriſing, that the Stoic and the Epicurean ſhould have entertained a jealouſy of one another, ſince the doctrines of the former would elevate and refine the mind above humanity, by aſcribing to it powers unknown both to nature and reaſon; while thoſe of the other, as was aſſerted by ſome of the Stoics, would ſink man almoſt to the brute, by ſubjuga-

ting the regimen of his moral conduct to the corporeal appetites.

Of the various doctrines of the Stoics, none ſeem more inconſiſtent with their general ſyſtem than ſuicide; for, if we be taught, that, by virtue and wiſdom alone, we acquire ſuch a degree of apathy as to ſet natural evil at defiance, why ſhould we have recourſe to the moſt unnatural of all actions, in order to rid ourſelves of evils which we no longer feel? Zeno, we are told, at ninety-eight years of age, having hurt his finger by a fall, ſtrangled himſelf. Notwithſtanding the philoſophy of the Stoics, one is unwilling to believe an action ſo unworthy of Zeno, whoſe character, as a good man, was not inferior to that of any of the Greek philoſophers. He was of a mild diſpoſition, modeſt, and of great temperance; inſomuch that it paſſed into a proverb, *Zenone continentior*. It hath been found, that the ſplinter of a bone, even ſo remote from the head as the hands

or feet, hath proved the cauſe of the diſtemper termed the locked jaw. Of this, ſome examples have of late years been regiſtered in literary journals. This diſorder, therefore, may well be ſuppoſed to have happened to Zeno; and, from his advanced age, joined with the nature of the diſtemper, for the moſt part fatal, he being unable to ſwallow food, or perhaps to ſpeak, his friends might be led, from their ignorance of the diſeaſe, to believe he had ſtrangled himſelf.

LETTER

LETTER XL.

To Lælius.

IT is not a little to the honour of Socrates, that his name hath been uſed proverbially to denote a wiſe man; nor were any of the Greek philoſophers more diſtinguiſhed than he, whether we regard his conduct in the common oeconomy of life, the vigour of his mind, or the tenor and tendency of his philoſophy. But, whatever perſonal merit he poſſeſſed, there were ſome accidental circumſtances which conſpired to heighten his fame. Among theſe, we may reckon the period in which he lived. Towards the end of his life, Athens was in a ſtate of ſubjection to Sparta, and under the deſpotiſm of thirty tyrants. Socrates, who uſed formerly to teach his ſcholars the duties of a citizen and

of a magiſtrate, did not fail then to mark the functions of the latter in a more ſtriking manner, notwithſtanding the danger to which he knew this expoſed him.

The behaviour of Socrates at his trial, condemnation, and death, merits great applauſe, and tends greatly to heighten our ideas of that philoſopher. Theſe proved the ſureſt touchſtone, how far he could apply to practice, and, in the ſevereſt trial, avail himſelf of the principles of the philoſophy which he had, for a long tract of years, taught others. The writings of Plato and of Xenophon make the laſt, and perhaps not the leaſt favourable circumſtance which the fame of Socrates is indebted.

It is hardly neceſſary to obſerve, that Socrates was the ſon of Sophroniſcus, a ſtatuary; that he learned his father's art; that, in his younger years, he carried arms, and ſignalized himſelf by that brave and generous conduct which marks and doth honour

honour to the military character. After his adventures in an unſucceſsful war, he remained, for the moſt part, in Attica, nor travelled, as was the cuſtom with other philoſophers, probably believing it unneceſſary to ſearch in diſtant countries for what he could find at home, if it can be found at all, the knowledge of one's ſelf.

Socrates ſtudied under Anaxagoras and Archelaus. Theſe two philoſophers, being of the Ionic ſchool, dwelt much on phyſical inquiries. Socrates, it is ſaid, complained, that, in their inveſtigations, they ſhowed too little regard to final cauſes. He afterwards abandoned the ſtudy of natural knowledge, devoting himſelf wholly to morality. He availed himſelf, however, of the former, in ſupporting the doctrine of one intelligent cauſe, which he had learned from his maſters. He attended to the ſtructure of organized bodies, particularly to the mechaniſm and oeconomy of his own, and probably to the texture of the particular

parts,

parts, in tracing intelligence and design. His physical knowledge was likewise of use to him in silencing the sophists, who were commonly erroneous on that subject. Many of his contemporaries, who applied themselves to the study of philosophy, jealous of his merit, and envious of his fame, teazed him with problematical questions; to which, lying without the sphere of human knowledge, he gave the general answer, "What is above our understanding doth not concern us *." Upon this they put a malevolent interpretation, observing, that, as the divine nature is above our comprehension, it ought, according to Socrates, to have no share of our thoughts, and, consequently, all worship of superior beings would be at an end. Socrates, by the preceding answer, meant no more than that it is in vain, if not impious, to attempt explications of those parts of Nature which God hath placed beyond the powers of the human mind; such as the cause of gravitation,

* Quod supra nos, nihil ad nos.

tation, of adheſion, of the vital motions in animal bodies, and many other ſimilar problems. But, at the ſame time, he taught that the oeconomy to be found in thoſe very inexplicable parts of Nature, ought to lead us to admire and to adore that Being who is the author of them.

Beſides the exiſtence of an univerſal mind, he taught that of the ſoul after death, the regency of the world by a providence, and that the ſtate of things in the next life will have a relation to our moral conduct in this. From theſe doctrines, Socrates hath been denominated by ſome authors the Chriſtian Philoſopher. One of his leading principles of morality was to regulate our moral conduct, ſo as to be what we would wiſh others to believe we are. He devoted himſelf to the ſervice of his country, by his unwearied endeavours to form the minds of the Athenian youth to the ſtricteſt principles of virtue; and in this he ſucceeded better than any who had gone before

fore him. Indeed, he was the firſt in Greece who could, with propriety, be called a Moral Philoſopher; for the Cynics, Stoics, and Epicureans, had not then appeared. At his trial, he conducted himſelf with an uniform and inflexible firmneſs of mind, neither diſcovering meanneſs or timidity, on the one hand, nor on the other philoſophical pride, or an affected contempt of death.

I have taken upon me to offer you conjectures concerning the metempſychoſis of Pythagoras, the theology of Epicurus, and the death of Zeno; I ſhall here ſubjoin an idea relating to the laſt words of Socrates. This ſaying hath been uſed as an argument to prove, that, notwithſtanding his boaſted philoſophical principles, he was ſtill a ſlave to the ſuperſtitious idolatry which then prevailed. Having drunk the poiſon, he aſked the ſervant what he was to do next. He was adviſed to continue walking, till he ſhould feel his limbs be-

come feeble, and then to lay himſelf down upon the bed. Having done ſo, he covered his face with his cloak, and, remaining ſome time ſilent, and without motion, he uncovered his face again, and, looking to his friend Crito, ſaid, I owe a cock to Æſculapius; diſcharge this debt for me, and do not forget it. Having ſaid this, he expired.

Mineral poiſons are found to act upon the bowels, and ſoon to ſpread their baneful influence through the body, occaſioning exquiſite tortures, but leaving the brain, for the maſt part, untouched. Vegetable poiſons act differently, affecting the brain with intoxication, eſpecially when taken in a liquid form, as appears from many accounts to be found in medical and other records. Hemlock itſelf, given in ſmall quantities, and as a medicine, ſometimes diſturbs the ideas, and hath been obſerved to affect the memory for ſome minutes. Socrates, therefore, in my opinion, is not

more

more open to a charge of ſuperſtition and idolatry, than a perſon of the preſent times would be, who, being ſufficiently inſtructed in the ritual of the antient Greeks, ſhould utter the ſame words in a dream, or in the rage of a fever. This idea of the effects of the poiſon upon Socrates muſt, I think, have been remarked by others, though I do not remember to have met with it.

With reſpect to the influence of the doctrines of Epicurus, of Zeno, and of Socrates, upon the mind and manners of a citizen, we may form ſome judgment from the characters of three diſtinguiſhed perſonages, to be met with in the moſt intereſting period of the Roman ſtate. Theſe were, Atticus, Cicero, and Cato. Atticus, being an Epicurean, paſſed his life in eaſe and pleaſure. He avoided taking any ſhare in the affairs of the ſtate, though he might have enjoyed the higheſt offices. Being himſelf learned, he had learned men always

ways about him, and entertained his friends with elegance, and in the moſt refined taſte; ſo that his inactivity did not detract from his dignity.

Cicero, an academic, devoted himſelf to the ſervices of the ſtate, and, being conſtantly involved in political life, he accommodated himſelf to the various humours of mankind, as far as decency and virtue would permit. His natural powers, joined with an urbanity, which he acquired from his conſtant intercourſe with the world, recommended him to people of all ranks.

Though many of the Romans ſtudied the principles, and adopted the manners of the Stoics, few ſeem to have carried them to ſo great a height of ſeverity as the younger Cato. It hath been obſerved, that Atticus and Cato, by a too rigid adherence to their philoſophical principles, rendered themſelves almoſt uſeleſs to their country. Had Cato lived in the early periods of the republic, his auſterity, and attachment to

rectitude

rectitude, or what he deemed to be ſuch, would have been reſpected, and his manners been held proper objects of imitation: for, in thoſe times, the rude, ſimple, and virtuous lives of the Romans, were a-kin to thoſe of the Stoics, though philoſophy was then almoſt unknown in Rome. But, in the end of the conſular, or beginning of the imperial ſtate, libertiniſm, and a general corruption of manners, prevailed; and the Roman people viewed the ſeverity of Cato's manners rather as a reproach to their own, than as a pattern to be imitated. Had this worthy citizen, therefore, relaxed ſomewhat in his auſterity, he would have ſucceeded better in his laudable efforts to reform the ſtate. Thus, while Cato, in the midſt of confuſion and danger, obſtinately tenacious of thoſe principles which he had adopted as the ſtandards of his actions, was inflexible in his meaſures, Cicero conſidered a political ductility of manners to be indiſpenſible in the management of a litigious and tumultuous ſtate.

LETTER

LETTER XLI.

To Lælius.

TO purſue philoſophy through her various windings and doublings, from the days of Carneades to the preſent times; to paint her, as ſhe hath appeared in that long period, for the moſt part, ſevere, frequently obſcure and cloudy, ſometimes groteſque, ſeldom gay or attracting, would be a taſk no leſs laborious and tireſome than it is unneceſſary in polite education. The Romans had ſchools of philoſophy; but, in general, they followed the Greek ſects, and almoſt always one or other of the three, of whoſe founders I have given you a ſhort ſketch in my former letters. Several of thoſe who taught philoſophy at Rome are mentioned by the Roman hiſtorians. But, as they did not diſtinguiſh themſelves

themſelves by compoſitions, or, if they did, their works have not reached us, they merit little or no notice. The philoſophical works of the Romans which chiefly claim our attention, and which have happily eſcaped the wrecks of time, are thoſe of Lucretius, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Antoninus the philoſopher; the three laſt were of the ſect of the Stoics.

Though there were ſchools of philoſophy at Rome, the ſons of the great families were commonly ſent to Athens, Rhodes, or ſome other of the Greek towns, for education, probably to remove them from that diſſipation and corruption of manners which univerſally prevailed in Rome, and with which the minds of youth educated there could hardly fail to be infected.

About the end of the third, and beginning of the fourth century, we meet with three names of conſiderable note. Theſe are Plotinus, Porphyrius, and Jamblicus.

blicus. They lived in ſucceſſion as they are mentioned here, and were maſters and ſcholars in the ſame order. They were rigid Platoniſts; for, about this time, philoſophers began to arrange themſelves either under Ariſtotle or Plato; and a war was carried on with much heat, and with little interruption, till the laſt century. A few philoſophers, however, of better temper, endeavoured to put an end to this philoſophical warfare, by ſhowing that the principles of the contending parties did not ſtand ſo much in oppoſition to one another as not to admit of an accommodation.

In the fifth century, Proclus, a philoſopher of conſiderable merit, and likewiſe of the Alexandrian ſchool, taught at Athens. He devoted himſelf much to the ſtudy of mathematics, and is ſaid to have underſtood and explained the Platonic philoſophy better than any who had gone before him.

As

As monkery increaſed, taſte and ſound philoſophy declined. The ſchools and the convents in which any veſtige of literature was to be found, adopted the ſyſtems which they deemed the beſt ſuited to ſupport the doctrines of Chriſtianity. Some of them making ſelections from the different ſyſtems of Greece, and frequently interlarding theſe with their own opinions, framed ſyſtems unheard of before, and calculated rather to perplex than to enlighten the mind. In the ſixteenth century, when ſeveral ſtates of Europe had ſhaken off the papal yoke, mens minds, feeling the ſweets of relaxation, after ſo long and ſo heavy a bondage, learned to think with more liberality, and to diſcloſe new opinions with leſs reſerve. While the ſciences were cheriſhed, and a freedom of inquiry began to obtain in the reformed ſtates, Galileo was perſecuted in Italy for phyſical diſcoveries and doctrines which are, at this day, univerſally recognized as certain truths: And Copernicus, in an earlier period, would have ſhared the ſame fate,

had not a natural death prevented his perſecution, when he had juſt ſeen the firſt impreſſion of his works.

A familiarity with the Greek and Roman Authors, and the general uſe of the Latin language among men of letters, contributed greatly to the progreſs of the ſciences and of taſte. As learned men of the preſent time ſeem more diſpoſed to betake themſelves to their reſpective vernacular languages, than to uſe the Latin, it is to be feared, that this can hardly fail to prove detrimental to literature. A common language ought conſtantly to ſubſiſt among learned men. The advantages ariſing from it are obvious. When tranſlations are neceſſary, correſpondence cannot be carried on with the ſame readineſs and pleaſure as in a common language, nor can authors of one nation have the ſatisfaction to ſee, or the opportunities of improving themſelves by the ſtyle and manner of thoſe of another. Even the time loſt in tranſlations

is a clog on the progreſs of arts and ſciences.

The French language is, indeed, at preſent, more generally uſed than any other in Europe. But it is not ſo univerſal as to anſwer the purpoſes of a common language. Beſides, the French, as well as all other living languages, being in a fluctuating ſtate, is not ſo well ſuited to this end as dead languages, which are no longer liable to changes. It is, therefore, to be regretted, that our ſeminaries have, for ſome years back, relaxed in the uſe of the Greek and Latin; and it is not a little to the honour of ſome Students in the univerſities, both of Great Britain and of France, who, ſeeing the inconveniencies attending the neglect of theſe languages, have of themſelves formed aſſociations for their improvement in them; and that ſome of theſe young men have thus acquired a readineſs in ſpeaking and in writing Latin with conſiderable elegance.

The

The number of languages uſed in Europe at preſent, and much more of thoſe in the other quarters of the world, is a ſufficient argument to return to the Latin as a common language. Though one ſhould take the trouble to learn all the languages of the different nations of Europe, he would ſtill find, after this Herculean labour, he had not acquired the knowledge of them ſo perfectly as to be able to judge with taſte of the ſtyle and manner of their reſpective authors. Whoever hath learned with attention the languages commonly taught in our ſchools, muſt be ſenſible that the ſpirit and genius of any one language, and much more the idiomatical diſtinctions of many, is a matter wholly different from the mere meaning of words. For the former, long labour, cloſe attention, and even a juſtneſs of taſte, are requiſite. The other is a work of memory. But though this ſubject would admit of a more ample diſcuſſion, it is preſumed, that a moderate degree of reflection will ſuffice to convince any unprejudiced perſon

perſon of the utility of a common language in preſerving and improving taſte, as well as in facilitating the progreſs of the arts and ſciences.

LETTER XLII.

To Lælius.

SINCE the Reformation many philoſophical doctrines have been preſented to the public. But theſe have, for the moſt part, rather been conſidered as the particular opinions of their reſpective authors, than adopted as general ſyſtems. Des Cartes, it is true, had many followers, who warmly ſupported his principles againſt others who taught and wrote againſt them with much acrimony. Des Cartes, being of a bold and enterpriſing genius, could not ſubmit to the ſcholaſtic philoſophy then in faſhion. But,

But, emancipating his mind from the doctrines of the ſchools, he applied himſelf to the ſtudy of mathematics. This, however, was not ſufficient to correct the luxuriancy of his imagination. To this he gave way, in his younger years, in framing his ſyſtem of nature, which is, in a ſenſe too literal, "the baſeleſs fabric of a viſion." It would appear, that when he reached greater maturity, he had not the reſolution to make any change in thoſe principles which he had formerly laid down as the foundation of his phyſical ſyſtem, though in ſome paſſages of his works, he ſeems to inſinuate, that theſe principles are not altogether ſatisfactory; and he is ſaid, when in company with his particular friends, to talk in a jocular manner of his philoſophical romance. His definition of matter, and his ideas of motion, ſuffice to ſhew the inſufficiency of his philoſophy. The eſſence of the former he makes to conſiſt wholly in extenſion. In his definition of motion he makes no diſtinction between abſolute or real and relative

lative or apparent motion. One of a benevolent diſpoſition of mind, in reading ſome other parts of this philoſopher's works, cannot fail to regret that he ſhould have been the author of a ſyſtem ſo inconſiſtent and viſionary.

Upon the rotten foundation of Carteſian principles have been built the doctrines of materialiſm and fatality, particularly by Benedict de Spinoza, a Jew of Amſterdam. This author, likewiſe conſtituting extenſion the eſſence of matter, was obliged to find matter in every part of ſpace; ſince no portion of ſpace, however ſmall, can be without extenſion. From this univerſal *plenum* he drew the raſh concluſion, that matter is the only neceſſary exiſtent ſubſtance. Being thus inſenſibly led into Atheiſm, he laboured indefatigably, by much artful and ſubtile reaſoning, to draw others into this whirlpool. Many of thoſe who have undertaken to obviate the doctrines of Spinoza, have followed him through a variety of

of his arguments, without regarding his fundamental principles; whereas, had they, in place of endeavouring to lop off branches, ſtruck at the root, they would have ſucceeded, without proceeding farther. No part of his reaſoning hath perplexed his adverſaries more than what he ſays relating to extenſion and thought; and yet no part merited their notice leſs. He might as well have attempted to examine perception, memory, imagination, or any faculty of the mind by an inch, a foot, or a yard, as to apply extenſion to thought; nor can any two things, not having the ſmalleſt relation, be examined by one another. In place, therefore, of laboured and ſerious anſwers, this metaphyſical ſophiſtry ought to be treated with ridicule or neglect. Whoever will take the trouble to examine Sir Iſaac Newton's demonſtration of a *vacuum* will immediately ſee the weakneſs and fallacy of the firſt principles of Des Cartes and Spinoza.

In

In juſtice, however, to the character of Spinoſa, it may be obſerved, that he was ſtrictly moral in his conduct, of pleaſant and gentle manners, of friendly diſpoſitions, and well qualified for ſocial life; nor is it improbable, that, had he lived longer, he would have changed his principles, ſince, in the former part of his life, he had been variable in his ſentiments reſpecting both philoſophy and religion. He died at forty-four years of age.

Of all the followers of Des Cartes, Leibnitz was the moſt diſtinguiſhed; but he neither adhered ſo tenaciouſly to all the parts of the Carteſian philoſophy, nor deduced from it ſuch pernicious doctrines as Spinoſa had done. Being informed of ſome of Sir Iſaac Newton's diſcoveries and opinions, he abandoned ſuch of his former principles as he thought leaſt tenible, and attempted an amendment of that philoſophy, by ſome new theories of his own. He undertook a reconciliation of the doctrines of Plato, Ariſtotle, and Des Cartes, the impractica-

bility of which he found upon a very ſhort trial. Though he availed himſelf of ſome parts of the Newtonian philoſophy, he was, upon the whole, an enemy to it all his life.

Among the French philoſophers, Gaſſendus and Malbranche made a conſiderable figure. The former, in a work which hath been applauded, ſets the Epicurean philoſophy in a more favourable point of view than it had appeared ſince the days of Epicurus. He ſaw the defects of the ſcholaſtic philoſophy, then univerſally taught, and therefore undertook a treatiſe againſt Ariſtotle's logic and phyſics. But, ſo high was the credit of that antient philoſopher in the ſchools, that Gaſſendus, foreſeeing he would draw perſecution upon himſelf from all quarters, abandoned this undertaking. He did not agree with Des Cartes, in his definition of matter, but made ſeveral experiments tending to prove a *vacuum*.

Malbranche is known chiefly by his work, entitled, *Recherche de la verité*. In this,

this, there is much acute reaſoning, though it be frequently abſtruſe, and in ſome places hardly intelligible. This author ſeems, from ſome paſſages, to have had his mind more warped by the doctrines of the Romiſh church, than is conſiſtent with a liberal inveſtigation of truth.

From the beginning of the ſeventeenth century, the different branches of philoſophy were carried on ſucceſsfully in England. Lord Bacon, obſerving that the courſe of ſtudies had been the ſame, or nearly ſo, upwards of two thouſand years, and that, in this long period, the minds of men had been occupied in ſcholaſtic doctrines, and endleſs metaphyſical diſputations, while Nature lay unexplored before their eyes, warmly recommended phyſical inveſtigations; cautioning philoſophers, at the ſame time, not to reſt theſe upon the evidence of ſpeculative conjectures, which had been the bane of the Greek ſchools, but ſolely upon experiment, and a cloſe attention to the operations of Nature. *Non fingendum*, ſays he

he, *aut excogitandum, ſed inveniendum quid natura faciat aut ferat.*—This was the general tendency of that celebrated philoſopher's firſt publications, which had the beſt effects not only in England, but in the different parts of Europe.

Mr Boyle followed Lord Bacon; and no philoſopher ever inveſtigated Nature by experiments with greater aſſiduity, or with more ſucceſs. He made many diſcoveries in chymiſtry, and was the firſt who reduced hydroſtatics to a regular branch of ſcience. He never failed to let the world know the ſucceſs of his labours, by various publications. Being of a liberal and benevolent diſpoſition, he ſpared no expence, not only in procuring inſtruments for his own uſe, but in aſſiſting and encouraging others to purſue phyſical inquiries.

Few philoſophers have been of greater ſervice to the republic of letters than Mr Locke; nor have any treated abſtract ſubjects, and particularly the nature, powers, and

and operations of the human mind, more ſcientifically, or with greater perſpicuity. His Eſſay on the Human Underſtanding had not been long committed to the public, when the logic of the ſchools began to fall into diſcredit; and it at length gave way to this more rational method of inveſtigating truth. It was not a little to the honour of Mr Locke, that, immediately upon the publication of his Eſſay, many teachers, jealous of its ſucceſs, and ſuſpecting they might be brought under the neceſſity of changing their former method, laboured to depreciate it. For teachers are apt to conſider it as an indignity to be obliged to adopt a new method of teaching, in place of that which they had ſpontaneouſly chooſen. Hence oppoſition to works of merit hath frequently originated from quarters from which it ought leaſt to have been expected.

It is unneceſſary to mention the extraordinary merits of Sir Iſaac Newton, the firſt of this diſtinguiſhed groupe. His powers in calculation; his application of geometry

to

to Nature; his demonſtration of the laws and oeconomy of our ſolar ſyſtem; his diſcoveries relating to light and colours; his endeavours to regulate chronological hiſtory, conſpire to mark him a philoſopher perhaps ſecond to none who have appeared in any age.

Thus you have had, in a few letters, a ſketch, though a very ſuperficial one, of the progreſs of philoſophy, from the Greek ſchools downwards. For a more ample diſcuſſion of the ſentiments of the leading philoſophers of Greece, I cannot recommend you to a better volume than that of the learned and ingenious Dr Smith on the Theory of Moral Sentiments *. You will there find the opinions of theſe philoſophers relating to virtue, happineſs, and moral conduct, treated with elegance and perſpicuity, examined with accuracy and acuteneſs, impartially compared, and more fully and diſtinctly diſcuſſed than could have been expected in ſo ſmall a compaſs.

LETTER

* Part VI. Of Syſtems of Moral Philoſophy.

LETTER XLIII.

To Hortensia.

I Readily acquieſce, in your ſentiment, that the parties were not altogether impartial judges in the controverſy which we heard agitated the other evening, relating to the ſuperiority of taſte in French and Engliſh authors. The influence of education, in determining the mind in ſuch caſes, is univerſally allowed. But this is not the only biaſs to which the mind is liable. We will always be diſpoſed to judge more favourably of a compoſition in the language which we have been accuſtomed to ſpeak from our infancy, than of the ſame compoſition in a language which we have not acquired till later in life, even though we conſider ourſelves as competent judges of the idiomatical beauties of that language.

Hence

Hence the French and the Engliſh ſeldom judge ſo favourably of the compoſitions of their neighbouring nations as they ought. Voltaire is not the only foreigner who aſks where the beauties of Shakeſpeare are to be found. But, not to dwell on this ſubject, I could have wiſhed that the company had not parted immediately after having broached another, I mean the progreſs of taſte in Europe, and particularly in Britain. On this, I intended to make ſome ſmall reparation for my former ſilence, by preſuming to offer a thought or two; and let theſe, which you will find to be but ſuperficial, make up the remainder of this letter.

The deficiency of taſte among the generality of mankind appears from three circumſtances. The firſt is, that the objects of taſte are in a conſtant ſtate of fluctuation; and the preferring or rejecting ſuch objects is frequently attended with uncertainty. But this ought not to be the caſe, were true taſte to obtain with the greater

part

part of any particular ſociety; for true taſte cannot be ſuppoſed to exchange the better for the worſe. The inſtability, therefore, of man in this choice, and the fluctuating ſtate of the objects themſelves, make a proof of its kind, that the ſtandard of taſte is either yet undiſcovered, or is known to very few. The ſecond is, that nations have always been obſerved to riſe, by very ſlow degrees, from a ſtate of barbariſm, to a ſtate of high refinement. From Cecrops, the firſt King of Athens, to Pericles, in whoſe time a refined taſte firſt reached a high pitch, was a period of about a thouſand years. From the building of Rome to the Auguſtan age was upwards of ſeven hundred years; and about the ſame number from William the Conqueror to the preſent time. The third circumſtance is, that no nation hath been known to remain long in a ſtate of high refinement, but has always declined, and tended again to a ſtate of barbariſm. To theſe obſervations we may add that, of the various nations which

are now on the earth, or which have appeared in former times, few have cultivated the arts to a high degree; and ſtill fewer have conducted that cultivation with taſte.

We may obſerve, that, in ſtates where literary genius ſhows itſelf, in any conſiderable degree, different periods are diſtinguiſhed by their reſpective ſtyle and manner of compoſition, whether we regard the ſubjects, or the methods of treating them. If we look back to the middle ages, when ſcience, genius, and taſte were almoſt wholly extinguiſhed; when prieſts and monks kept the minds of the people in fetters; when an intercourſe with intermediate ſpirits, whether angels or demons, was impreſſed upon young minds, and retained for life; when magic, ſpells, and incantations made articles of creeds, we find legendary compilations then popular; and whatever fell within the powers of Nature, was conſidered as hardly meriting attention.

tion. This viſionary epidemic did not ſubſide till the family of the *Medicis* tranſplanted ſcience from *Conſtantinople* to Italy, and ſignalized itſelf, by inviting men of genius thither.

The fancies with which prieſtcraft had impreſſed the minds of men, however extravagant, were not altogether uſeleſs, being adopted as machinery by poets, whom genius and taſte taught this proper application. Of this, *Dante*, who flouriſhed before the period juſt mentioned, gave a good example, which was followed by others, down to the days of Taſſo. Both the French and Engliſh poets, particularly Chaucer, Spencer, and Shakeſpeare, have availed themſelves of the ſame kind of machinery. At length Milton brought this ſupernatural drama to an extreme degree of refinement.

The Britiſh poets from Milton's time, whether from a conſciouſneſs of an inabi-

lity

lity to ſoar ſo high, or being rendered timid by an age which became daily more critical and cenſorious, confined their efforts within narrower bounds. Tranſlations from the Greek and Roman authors, deſcriptions of Nature, moral eſſays, epiſtles, and fables, have been the chief occupation of later poets, excepting a few, whoſe epic compoſitions have their merit. The period, from Milton's firſt appearance to near the middle of the preſent century, hath furniſhed ſuch a conſtellation of poets, as Britain can hardly expect to ſee the like again.

This ſtyle of compoſition had hardly begun to decline, when a poetical influenza of a new kind broke out, that is, a paſſion for novel and romance, not of that elevated and enthuſiaſtic taſte which prevailed in the days of chivalry, when the characters of the heroes were marked by religion, love, a high and delicate ſenſe of honour, and by feats of courage; but conſiſting of plots replete with adventures in common life,

life, and frequently interlarded with minute delineations of the meaneſt and moſt unpoliſhed characters. Some of theſe compoſitions, conducted with art, and recommending the principles of virtue, have met with the correſponding approbation of the public. To whatever degree of merit, however, theſe volumes may lay claim, it doth not ſeem to be the opinion of the more ſagacious judges, that the general peruſal of theſe publications hath mended the minds or manners of their devotees, notwithſtanding much time and attention beſtowed upon them. Be that as it may, other readers, purſuing a different line of ſtudy, are amply compenſated by many laudable and ſucceſsful efforts in the different branches of philoſophy, and by hiſtories which have appeared within theſe thirty years, of a more elegant and manly compoſition than had been known in Britain before.

LETTER

LETTER XLIV.

To Lælius.

LANGUAGE hath always been conſidered as one of the moſt intereſting objects of taſte. Hence we ſee the greater attention given to it, the nearer a ſtate approaches its meridian of refinement. Could I venture upon an amendment of the Engliſh language, it would be to retrench the number of its vocal ſounds. The five vowels are ſaid to have as many ſounds in this language as there are letters in the alphabet. Six ſounds are aſcribed to each of the three firſt vowels. Any one may judge of the inconveniencies that muſt unavoidably ariſe from eighteen vocal ſounds marked by only three letters; and yet ſome have conſidered this redundancy of ſound as an advantage to the language.

In

In like manner, by ſubdividing each of the ſeven notes of muſic into three, ſo as to make the whole twenty-one, the ſcale might be ſaid to be enriched, but the muſic would become inſufferable. Without examining the matter minutely, it is abundantly obvious, that theſe ſounds lying ſo near, readily and inſenſibly ſlide into one another, ſo that the tonic pronunciation of the language is conſtantly in an uncertain and fluctuating ſtate. It is in a great meaſure owing to this, that the differences of accentual pronunciation are greater in Britain than perhaps in any other country in Europe, there being hardly a county that is not characterized by peculiarities, whether in the tones or accents of ſpeech. Thus, a ſtranger, after having travelled over Britain, would be apt to conclude, that the nation in general hath no vernacular pronunciation; nor can any one ſay whether the pronunciation of the beſt ſpeaker of Engliſh, about the beginning of this century, was the ſame with, or different

from

from that of the moſt eloquent orator of the preſent time.

Though I be no friend to punning, I may ſay here, I have got into the republic of letters; a ſtate in which liberty obtains ſo much, that innovations may be propoſed by any one without reſerve, ſince they may be adopted or rejected by others at pleaſure. Without further apology, then, I preſume to think the only remedy for the preceding evil is, to diminiſh the number of vocal ſounds, and to increaſe that of vocal letters. Each of theſe letters ought to mark a ſound diſtinct from all the reſt; nor ought any ſimple ſound, ſufficiently diſtinguiſhed from the reſt, to want its letter.

The letter *a* in the firſt ſyllable of *alderman*, or in *war*, hath a ſound wholly diſtinct from that in the words *make*, *take*. One of theſe ſounds, therefore, having a new letter aſſigned to it, and the other retaining

taining its former letter, *e* will become the third vowel. To vary the ſound of this letter ſufficiently from the two preceding, and likewiſe from the following, let it be pronounced as in the prepoſition *re* in the words *reduce*, *repoſe*, and many others.

It may be here obſerved, that a ſingle vocal letter ought invariably to mark a pure and unmixed ſound. The letter *i*, when pronounced ſingly by the Engliſh, and likewiſe as making a part of many words, is a complete diphthong. Thus, the Latin word *fagi*, is pronounced *fajai*. To find a proper ſound for this letter, then, it may well have one of the departments of *e*, as in *bee*, *tree*, which is a pure ſound, partaking nothing of a diphthong. The letter *o* may retain its ſound, as it is univerſally pronounced when it ſtands ſingle; for it is known, whether connected or unconnected with other vowels, to have various ſounds in the Engliſh language. The letter *u*, as it is commonly ſounded, differs

little, if at all, from the word *you*. Thus, in the word *utility*, it ſeems not greatly to matter whether the firſt ſyllable be written with the letter *u*, or with the word *you*. Such equivocal ſounds in language, from their obvious inconveniencies, ought conſtantly to be avoided. To reduce *u* to a ſimple ſound, it may be pronounced as *oo*, in the words *cool*, *pool*, *tool*; or, what is perhaps more expreſſive of what is here meant, as the French particle *ou*, as *l'un ou l'autre*. There remains ſtill a vocal ſound, which, though not hitherto uſed in the Engliſh language, merits well to be adopted, and marked by a letter; this is the ſound of *u* in the French participles *lu* read, *bu* drunk. This would be an acquiſition of a new vocal ſound to the Engliſh language, and more expreſſive of melancholy ſubjects than any of the reſt.

Thus have we ſeven vocal ſounds, each diſtinct from all the reſt, and in no danger of encroaching upon one another. It

may

may be doubted, whether an eighth ſound can be uttered that doth not approach too near to ſome one or other of theſe mentioned, to merit a letter in the alphabet. When we pronounce theſe ſeven vowels in order as they ſtand above, the mouth is moſt open when we utter the firſt; and in proceeding, the tongue either approaches to the palate, or the lips are contracted till we come to the laſt vowel, and thus we have an agreeable climax of vocal ſounds.

I am aware that Eraſmus, Lipſius, and, of a later date, Dr Middleton, have endeavoured to ſhew, that the Romans pronounced ſome of the vowels in a manner ſimilar, if not wholly equal to the modern Engliſh pronunciation; and this may perhaps be deemed an argument for retaining the preſent vocal ſounds. Without entering into this controverſy, but ſuppoſing the caſe to be as Dr Middleton would have it, it appears ſtill more proper that ſingle and double ſounds ſhould have their correſponding

ding alphabetical ſymbols; ſingle, or pure and uncompounded ſounds, being marked by one vocal letter; diphthongs by two. It may be further proper to obſerve, ſince it falls in the way, that, though monumental inſcriptions have been found of ſingular uſe in throwing light upon antiquity, greater credit hath been given to ſome of theſe ſtones than they ſeem to merit. When the formation of the letters is irregular and aukward, and the general execution clumſy, it is to be ſuſpected that the operators were illiterate, and had ſpelt words improperly, and according to the vulgar pronunciation. Were ſome of the grave-ſtones of the preſent age to be dug from under ground, twelve or fifteen hundred years hence, the antiquaries then may be miſled by ungrammatical inſcriptions on theſe ſtones, as modern antiquaries have perhaps ſometimes been, by yielding too eaſy credit to Greek and Roman inſcriptions. But, however coarſe the workmanſhip of ſuch antient monuments

may

may be, the evidence of their inſcriptions merits attention when it coincides with that of one or more manuſcripts.

It is only by a caſtigation, ſuch as that propoſed above, that a language, the lubricity of which ariſes from an exuberancy of vocal ſounds, can be corrected, and acquire ſtability. Children would, with eaſe and certainty, learn ſeven vocal ſounds, marked by their reſpective ſymbols; and the tonic differences of provincial pronunciation would inſenſibly diminiſh, if not wear out. It may be thought that it would be an injury to the language to rob it of ſo much vocal ſound. But the addition of diphthongs, with theſe ſeven ſounds, would ſufficiently diverſify the pronunciation of the language. Beſides, ſome of the vowels, when before double conſonants, acquire ſounds different from what they had when ſtanding ſingle, or before ſingle conſonants, as the letter *e* in the Latin words *ero* and *erro*. It may, however, be doubted whether

ther the Romans ever changed the ſound of their vowels in ſyllables in which theſe vocal ſounds, though not the ſyllables, are ſhortened by the following conſonants, or otherwiſe; for the addition of a conſonant doth not infer any neceſſary change in the preceding vocal ſound; as in the proper name *Batus* or *Battus*, the ſound of *a* is ſhortened, but not changed, by doubling the *t*, though the ſyllable be long in both. The vowels which chiefly ſuffer a change of ſound by doubling the ſubſequent conſonant, are *e*, *i*, and *u*.

One may, perhaps, be deemed an enthuſiaſt, in analogy, who would conclude, that, becauſe there are ſeven original tones in muſic, therefore ſeven is the propereſt number for vocal ſounds in language. And yet, had one obſerved at a venture, becauſe there are ſeven primitive notes in muſic, therefore there are probably ſeven original colours. Or, further, had one ſtill hazarded a bolder conjecture, that, becauſe the diviſions

ſions of a muſical chord to ſound theſe ſeven notes, is in a certain and invariable proportion, therefore the proportional refractions of the rays of light to exhibit the ſeven colours will be the ſame. Theſe conjectures, before Sir Iſaac Newton's extraordinary diſcovery, would have been conſidered as the reſult of philoſophical fanaticiſm. Accordingly Kircher, having offered to the public ſome ingenious thoughts concerning the analogy between ſounds and colours, was held a dreamer for his pains. We cannot pretend to ſay what hidden analogies may be in nature. For ought we know, the objects of our other ſenſes which act upon the mind by the intervention of the nervous ſyſtem, may be regulated by the ſame law. Even the ſenſe of feeling, and pain itſelf, are greatly diverſified. The prick of a needle and the ſting of a bee coincide in exciting pain, but the ſenſations are widely different.

LETTER

LETTER XLV.

To Lælius.

HAVING, in my laſt letter, communicated an idea of what appeared to me an amendment of the Engliſh language, by pruning the luxuriancies of its vocal ſounds, I ſhall here give you a few thoughts relating to the melody of language in general.

It is a difficult matter to perſuade any particular people that their vernacular language is not preferable to the languages of other nations, not only as being more expreſſive, and more ſubſervient to perſpicuity, but as being ſuperior in melody. This is wholly owing to the force of cuſtom, and to our more perfect acquaintance with the language of our own country.

The

The melody of language conſiſts chiefly in three circumſtances. The firſt is, a due proportion of conſonants and vowels. Too great a proportion of conſonants is productive of a laborious pronunciation, and renders language harſh and untractable. When vowels are multiplied beyond their due proportion, language becomes feeble, and wants that ſtrength and ſolidity which it acquires from conſonants properly interſperſed. The ſecond circumſtance which tends to promote the melody of language, is ſuch an arrangement of vowels and conſonants as may render language flowing, of eaſy and agreeable pronunciation, and ſufficiently articulated. Beſides theſe two circumſtances, the melody of language depends much on making ſuch pauſes or reſts in pronouncing, as the greater or leſs reſiſtance of conſonants may require. It is this laſt circumſtance I mean to conſider as a criterion of the melody of language; and, for this purpoſe, I muſt call in the Latin to my aſſiſtance; for no living lan-

guage that I know is ſo proper for illuſtrating this ſubject.

Verſes, from their metrical ſtructure, are better ſuited to aſſiſt us in examining the melody of language than proſe. The Latin heroic or hexameter verſes, though conſiſting of ſix feet, admit of a conſiderable variation in the number of ſyllables; inſomuch that an hexameter verſe may contain any number of ſyllables between twelve and eighteen. A verſe, however, of thirteen ſyllables, is equal, in extent of ſound, to one of ſeventeen; or, which is in effect the ſame, when the reſiſtance from the conſonants is leſs, the waſte of vocal ſound, in the ſame length of time, is greater: For, where the length of ſyllables depends upon the following conſonants, the reſts or pauſes, in reading theſe ſyllables, are proportioned to the oppoſition we meet with from the conſonants. But this will be more evident from examples. I ſhall, therefore,

for illuſtration, take four verſes of thirteen, and as many of ſeventeen ſyllables.

Caſtaneaſque nuces, mea quas Amaryllis amabat.
Me tamen urit amor: Quis enim modus adſit amori?
Sunt quibus in ſatyra videar nimis acer et ultra.
Torva leaena lupum ſequitur; lupus ipſe capellam.

Et fontes ſacros, frigus captabis opacum.
Sylveſtris raris ſparſit labruſca racemis.
Extinctum Nymphae crudeli funere Daphnim.
Reddemus Nymphis, et cum luſtrabimus agros.

In each of theſe eight verſes, the two laſt feet being equal, we muſt ſeek for the differences in the four preceding feet. Theſe dactyls, in the four former verſes, contain forty-eight ſyllables; and the ſyllables in the ſame number of ſpondees in the remaining verſes amount to thirty-two. In the forty-eight ſyllables, are fifty-three vowels, and ſixty conſonants. The thirty-two ſyllables contain thirty-two vowels; and, therefore, were the proportion of conſonants in them the ſame with that of the other four verſes, it ought to be thirty-ſix, whereas

whereas it amounts to fifty-eight. This high proportion of conſonants being no leſs than twenty-two beyond that of the vowels, would render the language extremely harſh, were we obliged to read the ſyllables of theſe verſes with as great rapidity as thoſe of the four former. But our reſts, or lengthening of the ſyllables, correſponding preciſely to the reſiſtance we meet with from the conſonants, the melody of the language is preſerved; and the rhythmical value of the verſes is equal, notwithſtanding the difference of ſixteen ſyllables in ſo few lines.

I ſhould not have troubled you with this proſodaical inveſtigation, had it not been that I have not found the melody of the Latin nor of the Greek languages aſcertained in this manner. It may further ſerve as a ſtandard, by which the melody of our own language may be brought to proof in ſome future obſervations: For, by examining the laws of a more perfect lan-

guage,

guage, we are led to diſcover the defects of others, and may thus be enabled to judge whether theſe, by the application of ſuch laws, can admit of amendment.

From this ſhort inquiry, we may judge how far the Greek and Roman poets had it in their power to diverſify the conſtruction of the ſame kind of verſes, particularly hexameters. We have reaſon to believe, that poets of a delicate taſte avoided bringing verſes together, having the ſame feet, in the ſame order. In the beginning of Virgil's Tityrus, we have not a return of a line with feet in the ſame order as any of the preceding, till the ſeventh verſe.

With reſpect to the melody of language, it may be obſerved, that, of the five vowels, thoſe, in the pronunciation of which we open the mouth wideſt, ſeem beſt ſuited to ſubjects tender, affectionate, or delightful, as the letters *a* and *e*, particularly the former; but the letters *o* and *u*, in the pronouncing

nouncing of which the lips are more contracted, are expreſſive of what is mournful, gloomy, or horrid. The letter *i* is to be conſidered as an intermediate ſound. There is no Latin poet from whom this obſervation can be exemplified ſo happily as from Virgil. The beginning and ending of his elegant addreſs to his country, in the ſecond Georgic, abound with the firſt vowel.

Salve, magna parens——
Aſcraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen.

The following paſſage abounds with the ſame letters:

———Veſtaque mater,
Quae Tuſcum Tiberim, et Romana Palatia ſervas.

The following examples are of the ſame kind:

Phyllida amo ante alias.——
Caſtaneaſque nuces, mea quas Amaryllis amabat.
———Calathis tibi candida Nais
Pallentes violas et ſumma papavera carpens.
Ah miſerande puer, ſi qua fata aſpera rumpas.

The

The effect of the two laſt vowels appears from the following lines:

Veſtibulum ante ipſum, primiſque in faucibus Orci
Luctus et ultrices poſuere cubilia curae.
——Crudelis ubique
Luctus ubique pavor, et plurima mortis imago.

The mute conſonants, whether labial, dental, or guttural, are proper for diſagreeable ſubjects, and in deſcribing particular ſounds. The redoubled peals of thunder terminating in a diſtant ſound, are exquiſitely expreſſed by Virgil.

——ille flagranti
Aut Atho, aut Rhodopen, aut alta Ceraunia telo
Dejicit.

The ſound of the Satyr's feet in dancing is well expreſſed in the following line:

Saltantes Satyros imitabitur Alpheſiboeus.

Agreeable ſounds, as zephyrs among trees, rills of water, or echoes from woods and hills, are more happily expreſſed by the liquid conſonants

Formoſam reſonare doces Amaryllida ſilvas.

The

The *r*, or canine letter, is commonly conſidered as harſh; hence ſome people, affecting an extreme delicacy of diction, throw it out of their language altogether. This letter, however, is of ſingular utility in poetical numbers. When it is repeatedly joined with *m* or *n*, it conveys the idea of ſonorous baſs notes, as one may judge, from the following verſe:

Urit odoratum nocturna in lumina cedrum.

And this letter, though five times in the following melodious line, is ſo far from being harſh, that the repetition of it adds a grace to the verſe, with which the author muſt have been pleaſed, ſince he introduces it in two different places, with little variation.

Hic viridis tenera praetexit arundine ripas.

The ſame letter, when joined with *ſ* or *c*, not guttural, is the fitteſt of any to expreſs what is harſh and irkſome.

Sed argutos inter ſtrepere anſer olores.

The

The craſhing of ice below the feet is expreſſed to great advantage in the following paſſage:

——ah te ne frigora laedant!
Ah tibi ne teneras glacies ſecet aſpera plantas!

And the poet hath been no leſs happy in conveying the following idea, by a ſimilar mixture of the ſame letters

——tuo cura Lycoris
Perque nives alium, perque horrida caſtra ſecuta eſt.

Every ear muſt be ſenſible of the harſhneſs of

Stridenti miſerum ſtipula diſperdere carmen.

I have avoided mentioning ſome paſſages in Virgil commonly remarked by the commentators, as expreſſive of the objects deſcribed; ſuch as the working of the Cyclops in Ætna; an invitation to ſleep by the humming of bees; the monſtrous figure of Polyphemus, by a verſe of a ſimilar conſtruction; the rapidity and beating of an horſe's feet in running, and ſeveral others.

It is to be obſerved, that a language, ſo artificial or ſo philoſophically conſtructed as conſtantly to furniſh words correſponding to the things to be expreſſed by the moſt ingenious poet, is not to be found. Yea ſome lines might perhaps be produced from Virgil which appear to prove the preceding obſervations to be ill grounded. Nor is this ſurpriſing, ſince the poet himſelf conſidered the Æneid as an unfiniſhed compoſition. It is not to be doubted that Virgil, had he lived, would have beſtowed much time and pains on the further poliſhing of his numbers, particularly thoſe of the ſix laſt books of the Æneid. For the former half of this poem is poſſeſſed of poetical merit avowedly ſuperior to that of the other half.

LETTER XLVI.

To Lælius.

LANGUAGE may be conſidered as a vehicle or machine, by which ideas are conveyed from one mind to another. Of different machines, intended for the ſame or ſimilar purpoſes, that which, with the ſimpleſt conſtruction, performs the work in the ſhorteſt time, is preferable to all the reſt. This obſervation is, with propriety, applied to language. Brevity is one of the moſt important circumſtances which conſtitute the perfection of language. I do not here mean brevity of ſtyle in any particular language, that being frequently affected, and productive of obſcurity. But of different languages, in other reſpects equal, that in which we can bring out our thoughts in feweſt words, is preferable to all the reſt:

And,

And, as ſimilar machines acquire comparative or relative power as they are diminiſhed in ſize; ſo the value of language increaſes, if I miſtake not, in a high degree from its brevity; perhaps, to ſpeak with mathematicians, in the duplicate, or even in an higher proportion. To explain this conjecture, which, I doubt not, will appear to ſome extravagant, let us ſuppoſe the fable of the Cock and the Pearl cannot be told in the language of an Indian in leſs than twenty lines, while it can be told in Engliſh, with equal advantage, in ten; and in Latin, or any third language, with no leſs advantage, in five lines. Then would the value of this laſt language be equal to four times that of the Engliſh, and to ſixteen times that of the Indian. Be this as it may, the analogy of language with machinery may be purſued one ſtep further: For, as a machine may be increaſed to ſuch a ſize as to be unfit for performing any kind of work whatever, the incumbrance or reſiſtance ariſing from its weight

and

and friction rendering it wholly uſeleſs; ſo, were any metaphyſical or complicated propoſition to be explained in the Indian language, ſo great extent of periphraſis would be neceſſary, that, inſtead of a perſpicuous ſolution, we ſhould quickly be involved in darkneſs; and a language, in which ſtill more words to expreſs the ſame idea ſhould be neceſſary, would be inſufficient for the common purpoſes of life.

Philologiſts are not agreed about the greater propriety of inflected terminations of words, as in Greek and Latin, or of particles by which the different parts of nouns and verbs are diſtinguiſhed, as in modern languages. The former is evidently more ſubſervient to brevity. A multiplicity of particles tends to inervate a language, as appears more from Lyric and Pindaric poetry, than from any other kind of compoſition, as I think hath been obſerved in a former letter. Were the Odes of Horace to be turned into modern lyrics, though the

tranſlator

tranſlator ſhould be poſſeſſed of poetical powers equal to thoſe of Horace himſelf, the tranſlation would be found, nevertheleſs, inferior in ſtrength and ſolidity to the originals.

Brevity is not the only advantage to be reaped from inflected terminations. The agreement of words with one another is thus rendered ſo obvious, that authors are enabled to disjoin two or more words in the ſame period, without affecting the perſpicuity of the ſenſe. This is known to be univerſally the caſe with the Roman authors. Some of the moderns have thought ſuch an arrangement of words productive of obſcurity. But we have no reaſon to believe it was ſo with the Romans, nor even with thoſe of our own times, who are maſters of the language.

The more or leſs entertaining method of telling the ſame ſtory muſt be obvious to every body. We hear one, lame in this art,

art, unwarily let his hearers into the unravelling, while he is yet in the middle of his tale; whence all that follows becomes inſipid and tireſome. Another artfully keeps the minds of his audience in a ſolicitous ſuſpenſe till the end of the narration, when their expectations are gratified by an happy developement. Something of the ſame nature is obſerved to obtain in the conſtruction of ſentences. The Roman authors, from an arbitrary arrangement of words, had it in their power to conduct this to the greateſt advantage. Accordingly, in theſe authors we frequently ſeem to wade through periods with uncertainty, when, in a word or two at the end, we find a ſatisfactory ſolution of what had juſt before appeared obſcure and problematic. This gives a grace and ſtrength to compoſition, which we can hardly expect in modern languages.

The elegance and melody of Greek and Roman verſification may be ſaid to ariſe chiefly

chiefly from inflected terminations; for the poets, aſſuming a much greater latitude in the arrangement of words than the authors of proſe compoſitions, were enabled to conſtruct their verſes according to the moſt rigid laws of proſody, and ſuch as are unknown in modern languages. Another circumſtance of importance in theſe dead languages is, that pronouns, ſo irkſome from the unavoidable neceſſity of repeating them in modern compoſitions, are frequently diſpenſed with. The following literal tranſlation from Ovid's introduction to his Metamorphoſes, with the words arranged, and the pronouns left out, as in the original, will ſet theſe obſervations in a ſtriking point of view.

" Into new inclines mind changed to ſing
" of forms bodies: Gods, undertaking, for
" ye changed theſe, favour my; firſt and
" from the origin of the world to my own
" uninterrupted bring down times ſong."

This paſſage, having the words in the common order of Engliſh, and the pronouns ſupplied, runs thus:

My

My mind inclines *me* to ſing of forms changed into new bodies; *ye* Gods, for ye changed theſe, favour *my* undertaking, and bring down *my* uninterrupted ſong from the firſt origin of the world to my own times.

In decyphering the former tranſlation, it is impoſſible to diſcover the relations of words with one another, as of the two adjectives, *new* and *changed*, that is, which belongs to forms, and which to bodies. The agreement of *my own* and *uninterrupted* with *times* and *ſong*, is no leſs uncertain. Had the original of this paſſage been burdened with the number of pronouns indiſpenſible in an Engliſh verſion, we ſhould have concluded it to be rather the taſk of a ſchool-boy, than the compoſition of an ingenious poet. Notwithſtanding the varied terminations of the Latin pronouns, a Roman ear could not have tolerated *meus animus fert me*, or, *deducite meum carmen ad mea tempora*. Mr Dryden, ſenſible of the

inelegance which attends a multiplicity of pronouns, hath taken the liberty to deviate from the text, by terminating this paſſage with Caeſar's, inſtead of *my own times.*

Two circumſtances, which, with others, mark the ſuperiority of Greek and Latin poetry over the modern, have been already mentioned. Theſe are variety and melody. The difference of five ſyllables, or any part of that number, in an hexameter verſe, affords an ample field to a poet of genius and taſte, to modulate his numbers to his ſubject, and to entertain his reader with a melodious variety of rhythmic changes. When we read any of the great poems in Engliſh, as Milton, the Æneid by Mr Dryden, or the Iliad by Mr Pope, we are reſtricted to an unremitting repetition of ten ſyllables; for an Alexandrine verſe will never be held, by a reader of taſte, a relief to the mind from theſe uniform meaſures.

With

With reſpect to melody, it is not in the power of any modern poet, however artful in verſification, to regulate his quantities according to the greater or leſs reſiſtance of conſonants. We ſhould think the four conſonants *r*, *c*, *d*, *b*, or *n*, *g*, *d*, *t*, but ill aſſorted to appear in a poetical verſe; and yet the former is to be found in the firſt line of Mr Dryden's tranſlation of the Æneid; the other in that of the Metamorphoſes by the ſame hand. Let either or both of theſe groups be tranſplanted to Virgil's or Ovid's Latin verſes, and the effect would immediately appear. Engliſh heroic verſes, conſiſting invariably of ten ſyllables, muſt be read in the ſame length of time, whatever number of conſonants they contain; or if, at times, a more or leſs accelerated reading be neceſſary, that ought to depend upon the ſenſe, not upon the ſtructure of the verſes. It frequently happens that we are obliged to make our way through a croud of conſonants, with a conſiderable degree of rapidity. Nothing renders lan-

guage

guage more harſh. Examples of this might be brought from the beſt Engliſh poets. But in language, perhaps, more than in any thing elſe, the force of cuſtom appears in rendering us inſenſible to harſh ſounds. Hence the languages of ſome nations in Europe, though abounding with the harder, and particularly with the guttural conſonants, and though harſh to every ſtranger, are, nevertheleſs, held by the natives as bold, manly, and ſuperior to every other language.

Beſides a due proportion of vowels and conſonants, and the moſt advantageous arrangement of theſe, proper accentuation is deemed neceſſary in conſtituting the melody of language. Without examining the propriety of the diviſion of accents into grave, acute, and circumflex; of elevations and depreſſions of the voice, to which a minute attention is ſeldom paid, it may be obſerved, that the accenting of words is, for the moſt part, little more than pronouncing one

one ſyllable of a word ſomewhat more forcibly than the reſt. This, perhaps, in every modern language, depends more upon cuſtom, than upon any general law or ſtandard. Hence the accents of ſeveral words have been known to undergo changes in different periods, and many words are differently accented in different provinces and counties at the ſame time. When the accents of words fall upon ſhort ſyllables, in which the vowels are followed by two or more conſonants, the harſhneſs becomes more obvious. Could we avail ourſelves of the Greek and Latin proſody, ſuch ſyllables ought not to be ſhort, or, if they be, ought not to be accented. According to the ſame proſody, there are many words in the Engliſh language which would be better without accents altogether. In the Engliſh word *important*, the accent is at preſent on the middle ſyllable; but, if we conſult melody, there ſeems to be no reaſon why it ſhould not be, with equal propriety, on the firſt or laſt, ſince each of the three

three vowels is followed with two conſonants, and the latter of each of theſe two is a mute. Let this word make part of a Latin verſe, and we immediately diſcover its proper pronunciation. Thus, neglecting the ſenſe, let it ſtand the firſt word in Virgil's Tityrus, where it will occupy the place of two long and two ſhort ſyllables.

Important patulae recubans, &c.

Whoever reads this line with propriety, will pronounce all the ſyllables of *Important* exactly equal, and an elevation or depreſſion of the voice here would have more the appearance of the emphaſis of a ſentence, than of the accent of a word. Hundreds of words in the Engliſh language might be brought to proof by the ſame proſody.

It may be obſerved, that by accents we inſenſibly ſhorten the neighbouring ſyllable of the ſame word, even where it is inconſiſtent with melody. This is productive of an harſhneſs, which, from the force of cuſtom,

cuſtom, is leſs perceptible to ourſelves than to ſtrangers, and can only be brought to a proper trial by meaſured lines.

Of things *important* and of dire *events*.

Here the accent is on the middle ſyllable of *important*, and on the ſecond of *events*, as it ought to be, becauſe of the conſonants. Let this line be changed as follows:

Of *events* dire, and of things *important*.

To read this line with its meaſures complete, the accent of *events* being now on the former ſyllable, the latter is ſhortened, notwithſtanding the oppoſition of the ſubſequent conſonants; and the accent falling upon the laſt ſyllable of *important*, the middle ſyllable is ſhortened, and thus the harſhneſs of theſe two words becomes obvious even to ourſelves.

In the Latin language, the caſe is otherwiſe; the lengthening or ſhortening of a ſyllable doth not affect the other ſyllables of the ſame word, unleſs ſome proſodaical law

law render it neceſſary. Let the words *volucres*, *tenebrae*, *cerebro*, ſerve as examples of this obſervation. In theſe words, the firſt and laſt ſyllables remain unchanged, whether the middle ſyllables be long or ſhort, as in the verſes below *.

You muſt not think that I mean here to depreciate the value of the Engliſh language. On the contrary, I believe it to be inferior to none now in Europe. But, in theſe laſt letters, I have aſſumed the department of a grammarian, hoping that you may find theſe few obſervations an inducement not to relax in your application to the dead languages.

LETTER

* Obſcoenaeque canes, importunaeque *volucres*.
Ad ſuetae ripis *volucres* et fluminis alveo.

Semper, et obtenta denſantur noctae *tenebrae*.
Eurialum *tenebrae* ramorum oneroſaque praeda.

Sanguine canis adhuc ſparſoque infecta *cerebro*,
Oſſaque diſperſit *cerebro* permixta cruento.

LETTER XLVII.

To Lælius.

I Am not unacquainted with what you mention concerning the ſentiments of a late philologiſt, who complains that greater attention hath been given to the Greek and Latin by learned men, than to their reſpective vernacular languages, and particularly to the Engliſh. He inſinuates, at the ſame time, that it would be better to apply ourſelves more ſeriouſly to the improvement of our own language, thinking it unneceſſary to beſtow ſo much time and pains on the Greek and Latin, and that theſe ought not to be ſo generally taught.

It is a juſt obſervation, that many men, diſtinguiſhed for literature, eſpecially in the two laſt centuries, were maſters of the dead

languages, and wrote with much elegance in Latin, while they were but ill informed in the proprieties of their mother tongue. We ought not, however, from theſe examples, to abandon languages which, while they tend to improve our own, have no leſs influence in refining our taſte in other reſpects. You know my ſentiments on this ſubject; and, though I had intended not to make further obſervations on it, I ſhall here ſubjoin a thought or two, which, with what hath been ſaid in former letters, I flatter myſelf you will conſider as motives to purſue the ſtudy of dead languages with greater attention than the preſent age ſeems diſpoſed to beſtow upon them.

After the long and dark period of the middle ages, when ſcience and taſte began to break upon Gothic ignorance and the lethargy of the monks, the Greek and Roman authors came to be the great objects of inveſtigation. Before the diſcovery of the art of printing, ſeveral examples of genius and

and taſte had appeared; among whom were Dante, Petrarch, and Boccace; but very few in the other parts of Europe. From the invention of printing to the end of the fifteenth century, ſeveral of the claſſics were publiſhed, and were even then to be purchaſed at a moderate rate. From this aera, the learned men of Europe, with one conſent, adopted the Latin language for communicating their works to the public, and for correſponding with one another. Thus ſcience made greater advances than if it had been attended with all the inconveniences which are known to be unavoidable in tranſlations, eſpecially when almoſt every nation in Europe hath its reſpective language. Beſides the obvious advantages which attend a common language, there aroſe among theſe learned men an emulation to excel in purity and elegance of ſtyle, and in claſſical compoſition, many proofs of which merit to be tranſmitted to the lateſt ages.

But,

But, without dwelling on the advantages which aroſe from theſe languages after the reſtoration of learning, every perſon of taſte will conſider his labour as ſufficiently compenſated by the pleaſure and benefit to be acquired from the ſtudy of the more celebrated authors of antiquity, in their original languages. We are told, indeed, that we now poſſeſs tranſlations of theſe volumes ſo accurate and elegant as may be ſufficient to ſuperſede the ſtudy of the originals. If any one be entitled to ſet a value upon tranſlations, it ought to be the tranſlators themſelves; and of theſe, none had a better claim to rate them high than Mr Dryden. Whoever will take the trouble to read his long diſcourſe prefixed to the Æneid, will find the differences between the Latin and Engliſh languages ſtated. That ingenious poet complains loudly of the diſadvantages under which he laboured, in being obliged to tranſlate into a language ſo much inferior to the original. "Where-
"ever the Caeſura is uſed," ſays he, "it
"gives

" gives a roughneſs to the verſe, of which " we can have little need in a language " which is over-ſtocked with conſonants. " Such is not the Latin, where the vowels " and conſonants are mixed in due pro- " portion to each other; yet Virgil judged " the vowels to have ſomewhat of an over- " balance, and therefore tempers their " ſweetneſs with Caeſuras." He after- wards tells us, " Virgil ſtudies brevity " more than any other poet; but he had " the advantage of a language wherein " much may be comprehended in a little " ſpace. We, and all the modern tongues, " have more articles and pronouns, beſides " ſigns of tenſes and caſes, and other bar- " bariſms, on which our ſpeech is built by " the faults of our forefathers."

Mr Pope hath ſingular merit in his tranſlation of the Iliad; and a few paſſages have been thought ſuperior to the origi- nal *; but, in the greater part of that tranſlation,

* Fitzoſborne's Letters.

tranſlation, the majeſtic ſimplicity of the original is not to be found. A verſified tranſlation can be little more than a paraphraſe, of the diſadvantages attending which, a mere Engliſh reader may judge from ſelect paſſages in ſacred hiſtory. The lamentation of David over Saul and Jonathan hath undergone repeated paraphraſes and verſifications; but theſe have been conſtantly found inferior to the bold and affecting ſimplicity of the text. The Iliad is a poem of that kind which doth not admit of improvement from refined language, or highly ornamented ſtyle, eſpecially when theſe are more diffuſive than the original. The lion's ſkin and a club become a Hercules better than a French ſuit and a cane.

Dr Swift's propoſal for correcting and fixing our language, is known to every Engliſh reader of taſte. That author laments the fate of thoſe whoſe compoſitions, whatever merit they poſſeſs, muſt ſink in value from the changeable ſtate of living

languages; and, after a century or two, though they may then be occaſionally conſulted, will ceaſe to be held objects of pleaſure or of taſte. It is, in ſome reſpects, a compenſation for an author's labours, to be conſcious that he writes in a language no longer liable to change, or to degenerate. Latin compoſitions of ſuperior worth, will find tranſlators in every age, while the ſpirit and genius of their authors remain unchanged in the originals; and, if they want merit, no language whatever will be ſufficient to preſerve them. The praiſe of folly by Eraſmus hath been repeatedly tranſlated into all the polite languages of Europe; but we muſt look for Eraſmus himſelf in the original, which will be tranſmitted to the lateſt poſterity as freſh as it came from the author's hand. Had Eraſmus written in Flemiſh or in Dutch, we ſhould hardly have known his name at this day. Lord Bacon's Latin works, though never remarked for elegance, may be read with ſatisfaction;

tisfaction; but the prudery of the preſent age can ſcarcely tolerate his Engliſh.

The greater part of words in the more elegant modern languages, particularly in Italian, Spaniſh, French, and Engliſh, are of Greek or Latin origin. There are few words in Engliſh exceeding two ſyllables which are not derived from one of theſe dead languages. The proper application of words hath been found to depend chiefly upon the knowledge of their derivations. Hence the advantages ariſing from an acquaintance with languages which are nearly connected with our own. It is true, ſome authors have been known to write with elegance and ſufficient correctneſs, though unacquainted with the dead languages. Theſe, however, are few; and even they have, for the moſt part, lamented this defect. But, whatever powers one may poſſeſs in any particular language, independent of the helps of others, it will be readilly allowed, that, to uſe words ſcientifically,

tifically, and from a knowledge of their origin, and of their connections with other languages, is more agreeable and ſatisfactory, ſince the propriety of their application is more certain.

It is a matter of importance to apply the laws of the dead languages to our own, as often as that application is not prevented by idiomatical differences. By ſubjecting our own language to the laws of another, we, in effect, adopt that other as a ſtandard. The advantages of conſtituting a dead language a ſtandard to one ſtill liable to innovations, are obvious; for the former being immutable, muſt retard the decline of the other, but, from its ſuperior value, cannot corrupt it.

To ſum up the matter; ſince the volumes of antiquity which have eſcaped the wrecks of time, are admitted by the beſt judges as ſtandards of elegant and refined compoſition; and, ſince the true ſpirit and

genius of their authors are not to be found in tranſlations, an acquaintance with the two dead languages ſufficient to read them in the original with taſte, and conſequently with eaſe and readineſs, ought to be conſidered as an important branch of education. For the preſervation, therefore, of theſe dead languages, we muſt look to our ſeminaries, whoſe buſineſs it is to prevent a ſacrifice with which the preſent age ſeems to be threatened.

LETTER XLVIII.

To Lælius.

ALL things, ſays Horace, however durable they may appear, are liable to changes, and tend to diſſolution; nor is it to be expected that language, in its nature fluctuating, can be preſerved in a ſtate of purity, it being, like other things, ſubject to

to variations and corruption. It ſeems not to be an eaſy matter to determine when a language hath reached its higheſt pitch of purity. Horace complains that Ennius, and other antient authors, enjoyed indulgencies in which the moſt diſtinguiſhed authors of the Auguſtan age were not gratified. It may, however, be queſtioned, whether this complaint be well grounded. While a language is yet barren, and far from a ſtate of perfection, it is allowable for men of taſte and genius to uſe liberties in correcting it, whether by ſupplying words where wanted, or by making changes which its rude ſtate may require.

When a language hath acquired an high degree of purity, the liberty of innovating, particularly of introducing new words, or of poliſhing it further, ought to be more circumſcribed. The Latin language, from the Auguſtan age downwards, is a proof that the degeneracy of language ariſes chiefly from efforts to poliſh it beyond a certain

certain degree. Hence the authors who followed that period, meaning higher degrees of refinement, inſenſibly degenerated into a worſe ſtyle; inſomuch that we can diſcover in thoſe who lived about a century later than Horace, more labour, with leſs perſpicuity. Nor can we judge of the ſtyle of this latter period from that of the younger Pliny, ſince he was upbraided by his contemporaries for imitating Cicero's ſtyle, and avoiding that which was faſhionable in his own time.

As we ſee objects to more advantage when placed at a proper diſtance from the eye, than when nearer; ſo we frequently judge more juſtly of events, and of circumſtances relating to them, which have preceded our own times, than of thoſe in which we ourſelves live. It appears now, that it would have been an eligible meaſure to have conſtituted the compoſitions of the Auguſtan period, as ſtandards of the purity and elegance of the Latin language, rather than

than for the ſubſequent authors to have attempted higher degrees of refinement; for, however little theſe authors doubted of their ſucceſs, the language evidently degenerated. To apply theſe obſervations to our own times, it may be aſked whether it would be adviſable to preſerve the Engliſh language as it now is, as far as that is in our power, or to labour its further improvement. To come at a ſolution of this problem, we ought to conſider the cauſes of the corruption of language.

When a ſtate is become populous, rich, and, conſequently, luxurious, a general impatience for changes, and a paſſion for novelty, are obſerved to prevail; nor are theſe confined to dreſs, equipage, houſehold-furniture, and the like, but extend their influence to language. New words are introduced, the ſpelling of others, formerly in uſe, is changed, and phraſeology itſelf ſeldom fails to undergo a new modification. In the earlier periods of a ſtate, while the culture

culture of manners is ſcarcely known, authors, little ſollicitous for the ornaments, and frequently regardleſs of the propriety of language, commit their thoughts to writing without reſerve. Style, then, though unpoliſhed, and, in later ages, deemed ſlovenly, is bold and unaffected. In it we find nature a compenſation for the want of art. As manners and language advance in refinement, the times become more cenſorious. At length a delicacy, not to ſay faſtidiouſneſs of taſte, obtains ſo far, that, though language makes but a ſecondary part in compoſition, volumes are in danger of being reprobated for incorrectneſs of ſtyle, however intereſting the matter contained may be. But, when refinement is carried beyond due bounds, exceſs of labour, ariſing from ambition to excel, is frequently productive of a formal and affected ſtyle, and breaks in upon that freedom and eaſe, without which the grace and dignity of compoſition can hardly be ſupported.

The

The intercourſe of nations with one another, is a known ſource of the corruption of languages. Of two neighbouring nations, though each be poſſeſſed of a language, excellent in itſelf, yet, if the idioms of theſe languages be different, and if the natives cultivate much correſpondence, the two languages will hardly fail to ſhare a reciprocal infection. The uninterrupted intercourſe of the Britiſh with the different nations of Europe, particularly with France, Germany, and Italy, hath had its influence on the Engliſh language. It is not the introduction of new words that is ſo much to be feared; authors of taſte, and who are attentive to the chaſtity of the language, will avoid foreign words in their compoſitions. But the idiom, on which the genius and ſpirit of the language in a great meaſure depend, comes, in time, to be inſenſibly warped to that of other nations. Thus, however we may be pleaſed with the preſent ſtate of the Engliſh language, it is hard to ſay, whether, in later

ages,

ages, its purity ſhall be diſcovered to have been on the decline in the preſent times, as we have obſerved to have been the caſe with the Roman language after the Auguſtan age.

It may be urged here, that, according to theſe obſervations, the Greek and Latin languages, from the conſtant intercourſe of the two nations, could not fail to catch a mutual taint. But, the Latin being formed from the Greek, the genius and conſtruction of the two languages were ſo much a-kin, that nothing of this kind was to be feared, except, perhaps, the adopting of words from one another; and Horace doth not ſeem to conſider this as an evil.

* Et nova factaque nuper habebunt verba fidem; ſi Graeco fonte cadant.

Dr Swift's remonſtrance for a ſociety, inveſted with public authority, for improving

* New words, and lately made, ſhall credit claim,
If from a Grecian ſource they gently ſtream.
FRANCIS.

ving and fixing the Engliſh language, would be more ſeaſonable in our times, than it was ſeventy years ago. The cauſes of the corruption of language are greatly increaſed within that period, particularly a general paſſion for novelty, for viſiting foreign countries, for importing their languages, and ingrafting them on our own, for the forging of new words among ourſelves, and for a new application of others formerly in uſe. To theſe we may add the conſtant publication and reading of novels and adventures.

Conſidering, therefore, the changes to which our language is expoſed, by theſe and other cauſes, which might be mentioned, it would appear a preferable method to preſerve the language as it now is, rather than to hazard its corruption by further attempts of refinement; unleſs this could be done by ſuch a ſociety as Dr Swift propoſed. We are now poſſeſſed of a variety of Engliſh compoſitions on every

ſubject, juſtly celebrated for purity and elegance of ſtyle. The elements of the language, digeſted alphabetically, and their various uſes, exemplified from theſe authors, might well ſuffice as a general ſtandard, or, if I may uſe the expreſſion, as a phraſeological code for future compoſitions. The labours of a learned and induſtrious author for this purpoſe, which have been for ſome years in the hands of the public, merit well the thanks of his country. But much remains ſtill to be done in that way; and the ſanction of a ſociety appointed by the legiſlature, or by a reſpectable part of it, would have a more certain effect than the work of any private author.

LETTER XLIX.

To Lælius.

THERE is hardly any character I would wiſh more to avoid than that of a Zoilus. The two laſt ages, leſs refined than the preſent, abounded with critics who could ill tolerate authors whoſe ſentiments did not coincide with their own. Hence literary controverſies were, for the moſt part, conducted with an illiberal and acrimonious ſpirit; and we have reaſon to regret, that, in the works of the learned of that period, though frequently poſſeſſed of much merit, we ſometimes meet with invectives expreſſed with ſuch aſperity as mark the authors to have been actuated by a vindictive principle. When an author lays his works before the public, he ought not to be diſſatisfied that they undergo an inveſti-

inveſtigation, however minute, provided this be conducted with candour, with temper, and with good manners. The elucidation, or even the diſcovery of truth, hath often been the reſult of reviews of this nature.

I am willing to believe I ſhall not draw upon myſelf the denomination of a moroſe or diſcontented critic, if I ſhall make ſome obſervations on a work which I recommend to your attentive peruſal. The volume meant, is Voltaire's age of Lewis XIV. In it you will find much entertaining hiſtorical information, ſome ſeaſonable and inſtructive reflections, and the whole conveyed in perſpicuous and elegant language. But, to whatever merit this work may lay claim, it is not, in every part, free from error. And the more artful an author is, or with the greater plauſibility his compoſitions are attended, he is the more apt, when he deviates from truth, to miſlead unguarded readers. One of M. Voltaire's

powers

powers is able to give a varniſh to truth more deceiving than open falſehood.

In every rank and line of life, that affection of the mind which we denominate Sympathy, ought to be cheriſhed; but in no part of mankind more than in thoſe whoſe lot is the military department. The ſcenes in which ſoldiers are often unavoidably involved, tend to cool, if not to extinguiſh the more delicate feelings of the mind. There are, however, ſome of diſpoſitions ſo humane and mild, as to reſiſt all the bad effects of the unhappy ſpectacles to which they are ſometimes expoſed. Sertorius, Brutus, Titus, and many other heroes of antiquity, though they ſpent the greater part of their lives in camps, ſeem never to have loſt their natural mildneſs. But diſpoſitions naturally cruel are rendered more callous by ſcenes of blood. Caligula, Nero, Domitian, and good it were we could ſtop here, became, by habit, wholly inſenſible to the ſufferings of others.

Yea,

Yea, the ferocity of theſe ſcourges of mankind increaſed to ſuch a degree, that they ſeemed to have been no leſs delighted with acts of cruelty, than the former with thoſe of benevolence. Hannibal was naturally cruel; and the ſuperiority of Scipio's character over that of the Carthaginian, was owing more to his benevolence, and to the gentleneſs of his diſpoſition, than to his extraordinary ſucceſs in arms.

In the year 1675, when the Viſcount de Turenne commanded the French army againſt the Germans, that General laid waſte the Palatinate by fire and ſword; and the Elector had the mortification to ſee from his caſtle two towns, and twenty-five villages, ſome of them large and populous, in flames at the ſame time. This act of cruelty ſeems hardly to conſiſt with the character of that General, ſo juſtly celebrated for prudence and bravery. In reading this paſſage, I would not have you admit M. Voltaire's apology for this conduct as ſufficient.

" He

" He wiſhed rather," ſays he, " to be cal-
" led the father of the ſoldiers who were
" entruſted to him, than of the people,
" who, according to the laws of war, are
" always ſacrificed. All theſe evils appear-
" ed to him neceſſary; his glory covered
" all. Beſides, the ſeventy thouſand men
" which he prevented from penetrating
" into France, would have done much
" more miſchief there than he did in Al-
" ſace, Lorraine, and the Palatinate."

This is a raſh aſſertion, and without probability. There had not been in Chriſtendom, for ſome centuries, ſo ſevere an example of military execution as the burning of the Palatinate. It was accordingly loudly complained of at all the Chriſtian courts of Europe, and drew upon Lewis the denomination of a mercileſs tyrant, which in reality did not ſuit his character. It were to be wiſhed the author had mentioned particularly what he underſtands by the laws of war. Civilized nations ought not

not to adopt the laws or cuſtoms of others yet in a ſtate of barbarity. We know, that, in our day, there are nations in the world who conſider themſelves as impowered by the laws of war to put to death every perſon belonging to the enemy, without regard to age or ſex. But, without undertaking a diſcuſſion of the argument relating to the rights of war and peace, we may conclude the conduct of a general to be cruel, when the miſchiefs done to the enemy exceed, in a conſiderable degree, the advantages to be reaped from them. Had Montecuculli been continued general of the German army the year following the death of Turenne, it is not improbable that a general ſo highly qualified would have penetrated into France; in which caſe, that nation would have had no reaſon to complain, had he laid their cities in aſhes by fire.

It is not enough that the Mareſchal de Turenne had orders from the King and miniſter

miniſter to lay waſte the Palatinate by fire, as M. Voltaire tells us, ſince we learn from the ſame author, that this General had ventured to conduct the more important arrangements of the campaigns according to his own ſentiments, though contrary to the orders given by the King and his miniſter. If, in any caſe, a general could take upon him to diſpenſe with the inſtructions of the court, one would expect it would have been when the laws of humanity required it.

In the year 1697, Lewis XIV. gave orders again to deſtroy the Palatinate by fire. The burning of that unhappy country by Turenne was but ſparks, ſays M. Voltaire, in compariſon of this other. In the ſeverity of winter, the inhabitants of cities, of many populous villages, and of magnificent caſtles, were driven from their dwellings, deſtitute of every neceſſary of life, while their habitations were reduced to aſhes by fire. Even the ſepulchres of the

dead were laid open in queſt of treaſure. The infirmities of age, infancy, ſickneſs, or whatever tends to move human ſympathy, availed nothing in averting or ſuſpending this devaſtation. Though M. Voltaire, upon the whole, condemns this proceeding, he ſhows a willingneſs to apologize for the King. Had the King, ſays he, been a witneſs of this ſpectacle, he would have extinguiſhed the flames. He ſigned, in the heart of his palace of Verſailles, and in the middle of his pleaſures, an order for the deſtruction of a whole country, becauſe he ſaw nothing in this order but his power, and the unhappy rights of war; but, by a nearer view, he would have ſeen all the horrors attending it.

Had the King of France been twenty years of age, or younger, this apology might perhaps have been attended with ſome degree of weight; but, as he was then on the verge of ſixty, the author muſt have

have ſuppoſed him void either of feeling or of reflection. Lewis was naturally humane, benevolent, and friendly; nor are we to conſider this order as a proof of a cruel or barbarous diſpoſition. But, to yield to a miniſter who dared to offer ſuch an advice, was a certain proof of his weakneſs.

In the military department, acts of cruelty are too often unavoidable. But, if any one be found in this line of life who can conſider himſelf as authoriſed by the nature of his buſineſs to commit acts of cruelty, or wantonly to ſport with the miſeries of mankind, he will not be cured of this deluſion, however he may be confirmed in it by M. Voltaire's apologies, eſpecially if he be among the number of thoſe readers whoſe admiration of this author leads them to yield implicit credit to all his reflections, whether of a moral or political nature. I mean not here to detract from the merit of M. Voltaire. In his age of Lewis XIV. he

he hath been at pains to correct the errors of hiſtorians who had gone before him, and of ſome who, I ſhould think, were hardly worthy of his notice. I would not, however, be underſtood to include in this number one, to whom the public is indebted for ſome curious anecdotes relating to the hiſtory of this Monarch. The author meant is the Abbé de Choiſy, who, though he informs us, with much parade, of his inviolable attachment to truth, of his opportunities of knowing many ſecrets, and of his art in coming at the knowledge of others, hath nevertheleſs fallen into ſome miſtakes, which M. Voltaire hath pointed out. Abbé de Choiſy hath perhaps been the leſs regarded that his ſtyle is too familiar, frequently vulgar and proverbial.

Whatever credit may be due to M. Voltaire's relation of facts and events, we ought not, without much reſerve, to acquieſce in his deductions and animadverſions, eſpecially when theſe are attended with

with ironical humour, or acrimonious ridicule. Deviations from hiſtorical truths are leſs to be feared than ſuch inferences and obſervations of authors as tend to pervert the morals of inattentive and unexperienced readers, or to conciliate their minds to falſe principles. Tacitus, among the antients, and among the moderns Machiavel, have been charged with political maxims, which, however plauſible, are deemed by grave and judicious readers hardly conſiſtent with the laws of virtue.

LETTER

LETTER L.

To Lælius.

IT hath been juſtly held a difficult taſk for an author to write the hiſtory of his own country with abſolute impartiality. Plutarch, in his biographical hiſtory, is allowed to be impartial; but, in his compariſons, he is charged with a propenſity to favour the heroes of Greece. M. Voltaire, when he treats of the French nation ſingly, ſeems not reluctant to lay open the faults of his fellow citizens, and the defects of that ſtate, whether theſe relate to the conſtitution and government in general, to any of the three great departments, civil, eccleſiaſtical, and military, to the miniſterial adminiſtration, or to the genius of the people; but, when he conſiders his nation in competition with its neighbours, we diſcover his

his biaſs. We meet with ſome authors poſſeſſing the powers, but with few who can boaſt of the virtues of an hiſtorian, ſo far as not to give a favourable colouring, in one degree or other, to what they themſelves wiſh. Such is the ductility of language, that one, artful in compoſition, and indulging his inclination, perhaps inſenſibly, may, as by a ſingle grain, caſt the balance, when neither ſcale ought to preponderate. In minute deſcriptions of the ſame battle by different authors, we are ſometimes left at a loſs to decide to whom the honour of ſuperior generalſhip is due: For victories and defeats are not always ſufficient to determine the mind in this circumſtance; and it is not an uncommon thing for a general to merit higher applauſe for a well conducted retreat, than his adverſary for his victory, though the public may, and, for the moſt part, do judge otherwiſe.

At

At the battle of Seneff, the Prince of Condé, diſtinguiſhed by the denomination of the *Great Condé*, attacked and routed the rear-guard of the Prince of Orange's army. This General, making a ſpeedy diſpoſition with the body of his army, maintained a fight with the French General, till the darkneſs of the night obliged both ſides to deſiſt. They kept their ground, reſolving to renew the fight at day-break. The Prince of Condé had never before known what it was to retire from a field of battle without a victory. Every officer of his army ſaw the danger in which they were; and the Prince was at length prevailed with to order a retreat, which was conducted in ſilence, and with ſafety, as ſoon as the moon was ſet *. The Prince of Orange, ſays

* An officer of cavalry, who ſtood near the Prince of Condé, gives the following account:——La nuit vint enfin, et M. Le Prince, dont le courage ne ſe laiſſoit jamais, ordonna qu'on fit avancer des bataillons nouveaux, et qu'on allât chercher du canon pour rattaquer les enemies à la pointe du jour. Tous ceux qui entendirent

ſays M. Voltaire and all the French authors, retired at the ſame time. But other authors tell us, that the Prince of Orange did not quit the field of battle, till, upon the approach of the morning, he diſcovered that the French General, availing himſelf of the darkneſs of the night, had drawn off his army. By the former account, this was a drawn battle; by the latter, it was a victory; for, to conſtitute a victory, it is not requiſite that the one army be put to flight, and that the other purſue. It ſufficeth that the one keep the field of battle, while the other is, from neceſſity, obliged to abandon it.

entendirent cette propoſition en fremirent, et il parut viſiblement qu'il n'y avoit que lui qui eût envie de ſe battre encore.—Tout étoit dans un grand calme des deux côtez, quand ſur les onze heures il ſe fit de part et d'autre une décharge terrible.—Toute la cavalerie s'enfuit.—M. Le Prince rallia ſes troupes le mieux qu'il put. Cette epouvante qu'il avoit eüe lui fit changer le deſſein de rattaquer les enemies à la pointe du jour, en celui de ſe retirer dans le moment; ce qu'il n'eut pas de peine à faire en bon ordre.

At the battle of Steenkirk, the Prince of Orange, then King of England, ſurpriſed the Duke of Luxembourg. The ſucceſs of that day is aſcribed by M. Voltaire chiefly to the bravery of three young Princes of the blood; allowing ſtill due applauſe to the conduct of the commander in chief. Other authors inform us, that the Mareſchall de Boufflers, coming from a diſtance, with a great reinforcement to the French army, was ready to fall upon the rear of King William's lines. By the one account the moſt truſty part of the King's troops was beaten from the field by the French body-guards, led on by the Princes of the blood. By the other, King William was obliged to draw off theſe troops, leſt they ſhould fall between two fires, from an unforeſeen accident. It may be obſerved, that the French authors are conſtantly laviſh of praiſe to Princes of the blood, or others nearly connected with the Royal Family. It is not improbable, that theſe young Princes, from a youthful ardour, and emulous of

of glory, might have done their duty, and perhaps more. But the feats of officers of inferior rank, though meriting equal, or even greater applauſe, frequently paſs unnoticed.

In general and mixed hiſtory, or what is not purely military, we ſeldom meet with the deſcription of a battle ſo diſtinct, ſo accurate, and ſo explicit as that of Fontenoy, by M. Voltaire, in his age of Lewis XV. I am able to judge with more certainty of the various accounts of this battle than of any of the two former. I ſhall, therefore, by way of ſupplement, not of criticiſm, offer a thought or two relating chiefly to the retreat, of what M. Voltaire calls, not improperly, the Column. This, I preſume, will not be unacceptable to one, who, with others in the military department, wiſhes to find circumſtantial accounts of battles.

The

The French army in line of battle was ſomewhat in the form of the face of a baſtion; the village of Fontenoy making the point or faillant angle. One part of the army extended from this village to the wood of Barry, which covered its left. The other part reached from the oppoſite ſide of the ſame village to St Antoine, a village on the Scheld. The Engliſh, and a ſmall body of Hanoverian infantry, making together about fourteen thouſand men, were oppoſed to that part of the French army which was poſted between Fontenoy and the wood of Barry. In each of theſe places were ſtrong batteries of heavy cannon, and between them were raiſed redoubts, at proper diſtances, behind which ſtood the French infantry. The Dutch lines were oppoſed to the other part of the French army. The body of Engliſh and Hanoverian foot having penetrated the croſs fire of the batteries, and paſſed the redoubts, charged the French infantry, with a well conducted fire of muſquetry and field-pieces, threw them

them into confuſion, and, at laſt, forced them to retreat. This column, continuing to advance with firmneſs and regularity, repulſed ſeveral freſh brigades of infantry, with two lines of cavalry, which were ſent, at different times, to ſtop its progreſs. The French general then found it neceſſary to give orders that particular bodies of troops ſhould ſpeedily take their reſpective poſts for ſecuring the retreat of the army, and conjured the King and the Dauphin to repaſs the river immediately.

The column had now got beyond the village of Fontenoy, and the great battery in the wood, and had left the redoubts at a diſtance behind, when ſome of the French generals obſerving its flanks expoſed, agreed to make a laſt effort, by an attack on its front and flanks, at the ſame time, with freſh troops and artillery; upon which the column retreated. It may be here obſerved, that, though the troops compoſing this column had been able to overcome this laſt attack,

attack, it was ſtill prudent for them to retire; for they had learned that the Dutch troops, of which the greater part of the army conſiſted, having made an early retreat, had left the French line, which they ought to have attacked, wholly untouched. The column, therefore, being hardly equal to one fifth part of the French army, had it advanced further, was obviouſly in danger of being totally ſurrounded with freſh troops; for the ground behind being very irregular, and much interſected with hollow roads, prevented the cavalry from getting up in due time to ſupport it.

Had this body of men retreated with the ſame firmneſs and regularity, and keeping up the ſame order of fire as that with which they had advanced, hiſtory would hardly afford ſuch another example of preſence of mind in officers, of attention to accurate diſcipline in ſoldiers, or of intrepidity in both. But a retreat ſo ſlow and regular was not to be expected, unleſs their flanks had

had been covered. The column, ſays M. Voltaire, retreated in good order, and with honour. Others ſay the retreat was hurried and diſorderly. The truth is, the troops having defiles at ſome diſtance behind the ſcene of action to paſs, and knowing that the French irregulars would not fail to gall them from behind the hedges, ſhould they get time to poſt themſelves there, made their way through theſe narrow paſſes, with all poſſible expedition, and without attending to order. But, forming on the next open ground, they marched into the camp, where they waited orders to ſtrike their tents, and to march. The French did not move from their ground, nor offer to purſue.

LETTER

LETTER LI.

To Lælius.

M. Voltaire would willingly apologize for the indecent rejoicings of his country-men upon the news being brought to France that King William was killed at the Boyn, that Prince being wounded there by a cannon-ball. The joy, and the expreſſions of it, in Paris, and in many other places, were hardly inferior to that which obtains upon the birth of a Dauphin. The people abandoned their work, the ſhops were ſhut, bonefires appeared every where, the bells were ſet a-ringing, even the guns of the Baſtile were fired. This, ſays M. Voltaire, was not the effect of fear, but of the hatred which the French people had conceived to that Prince, for having expelled his father-in-law from the throne

throne of England. The author hath advanced ſeveral arguments in ſupport of this opinion.

It doth not ſeem to be the cuſtom of nations to rejoice upon the death of any neighbouring potentate, however blameable his conduct may have been. Henry VIII. of England was a deſpotic and ſanguinary Prince. The fate of his wives, the death of Sir Thomas More, of the Earl of Eſſex, of Fiſher, and others, tend to mark the implacability of his natural diſpoſition. Philip II. of Spain is ſaid to have inherited all his father's vices, but none of his virtues. By the abdication of his father, he was put in poſſeſſion of extenſive dominions, and of immenſe riches, the father retaining only a pittance for his ſupport in a monaſtery; and yet the ſon would not pay above one third of this ſmall annuity: Which ingratitude is ſaid to have ſhortened the life of the father. Philip is further ſaid to have put his eldeſt ſon to death.

Charles King of Sardinia kept his father in a melancholy priſon, where, after long languiſhing, he died. We do not, however, hear that the neighbouring nations expreſſed their ſatisfaction for the death of any of theſe Princes, by public rejoicings.

Hiſtory doth not, perhaps, furniſh an example of public rejoicings ſimilar to thoſe of Paris, proceeding from hatred alone. When the citizens of Rome trembled for their lives under the Neros of different periods, they never failed, upon the death of theſe tyrants, to expreſs their joy publicly, and in different ways; nor is the mind at any time diſpoſed to give open proofs of its joy more than upon a ſudden liberation from terror. The cauſes of fear are undoubtedly productive of hatred; but hatred thus produced is not of itſelf ſufficient to ſtimulate to ſuch an ebulition of joy as appeared in Paris upon the ſuppoſed death of King William. If magiſtrates of inferior rank * could take upon them to give

* Magiſtrats ſubalternes.

give orders for the ringing of bells, and for illuminations, or the governour of the Baſtile for the firing of his guns without orders, while the King himſelf was ſo near, we have little reaſon to admire either the civil or military police of that metropolis; but, as both the governour and theſe magiſtrates eſcaped without animadverſion, it is ſufficiently evident, that the magiſtracy in general, from the Monarch downwards, willingly approved of theſe meaſures.

The author tells us in another place, that, when war is attended with bad ſucceſs, it is found neceſſary to keep the people in ignorance of it; and that the Prince of Orange, being almoſt always unſucceſsful in his battles, was rather deſpiſed than feared by the people of France. It is, indeed, a cuſtom in France to deceive the people, as far as that can be done, and the proſtitution of *Te Deum*, as a ſugar plumb to the public, is well known. But the court and miniſtry of France are, by theſe arts,

in

in the ſame predicament with Æſop's ſhepherd, who having, every night, given alarms that the wolf was devouring his flock, found no credit when that came really to be his fate.

M. Voltaire's obſervation, that the Prince of Orange almoſt conſtantly ſuffered defeats, is a truth; but there is, perhaps, no example in hiſtory of a general gaining ſo much ground upon his enemies, notwithſtanding the loſs of his battles. In this circumſtance, M. Voltaire hath, in different parts of his hiſtory, done juſtice to the Prince of Orange. This Prince gave early proofs of his powers in the art of war, ſufficient to let the loweſt people of France know how much he was to be feared as a general.

In the year 1672, Lewis was with a great army in Utrecht, Nimeguen, and the adjacent country. All France then conſidered the Republic of Holland as at an end,

end *, and its preſervation was wholly owing to an accidental thaw, after a long froſt in the following winter. In this deſperate ſtate of things, the Prince of Orange, then twenty-two years of age, got the command of the Dutch army, and two years thereafter, he was, at the head of this army, not far from the borders of France. Here he gave a check to the Great Condé, which was the firſt this celebrated general had ever met with. The Prince of Condé was then fifty-three years of age, and never afterwards appeared in the field. For, when he took the command, upon the death of Turenne, he did little more than lead the army into winter quarters. This great man, whoſe liberality of mind was not inferior to his military powers, declared openly, that the moſt experienced general could not have made a better diſpoſition, nor conducted his troops to greater advantage, than the Prince of Orange at the battle of Seneff. If, therefore, this

* See Mad. de Sevigné's letters for 1672.

this Prince, notwithſtanding his youth, was ſo formidable at the head of a Dutch army, we may well judge that the people of France would conſider him as a general much more to be feared when he got the command of the armies of Great Britain likewiſe.

M. Voltaire's obſervation, that the common people never dread a general, but when he is at the walls of the city in which they live, will be found juſt, when the general hath not yet had time to acquire military reputation. But the caſe will be otherwiſe, when a general hath commanded an army with applauſe, and for a conſiderable tract of years. The name of Marlborough was well known, and much dreaded even by the lower claſſes of people in France, eſpecially by thoſe of the northern provinces *.

Some

* The Marquis de la Far, no leſs a friend to his country than M. Voltaire, and as much diſpoſed to apologize for the errors of the French nation, when he

Some caſes are of a nature ſo problematical, that, knowing the diſcovery of truth to lie beyond

he can do it conſiſtent with truth, gives a ſhort, but candid account of this rejoicing in France, upon the report that King William was killed:——Guillaume eut avant le combat les épaules éfleurées et miſes tout en ſang d'un boulet de canon; mais il ne laiſſa pas de mettre ſes troupes en bataille, et de ſe trouver au combat; marqué de ſon grand courage; car ſa bleſſure étoit conſiderable, et il fut obligé de s'abſenter aſſez long tems de ſon armée. Cela fit courir le bruit dans toute l'armée qu'il étoit mort. On en avoit tant d'envie en France, que les peuples en firent d'eux mêmes des feux de joye, qui ne furent pas aſſez-tôt arretez par la cour, ou les principaux miniſtres, et entr'autres Louvois, entretinrent quelque tems l'erreur commune par leur diſcours. Le jour que ce bruit ſe répandit dans Paris, je revenois le ſoir de Sceaux avec le Marquis de Seignelai, et nous fûmes bien ſurpris de trouver par tout les ruës des feux de joye, des Princes d'Orange de paille, qu'on jettoit dans le feu en buvant à la ſanté du Roy, et en y faiſant boire les paſſans qu'on arretoit malgré eux. Cette fête generale déplut fort à tous les gens ſenſez; et je ne ſçai ſi le Prince d'Orange a jamais reçu un plus grande éloge, ny qui marquât mieux la crainte que ſes ennemis avoient de lui, que l'emportement de joye ou les mettoit la croyance qu'ils avoient d'en être defaits.——M. Voltaire tells us ſomewhere, that

beyond our reach, we find it adviſeable to abſtain from all inveſtigation, leſt the mind, being bewildered by equivocal circumſtances, be led to adopt the wrong ſide of the queſtion. In the courſe of your reading, you will meet with a delicate ſubject, on which M. Voltaire hath beſtowed ſome reaſoning and obſervations. However open theſe may be to objections, it will, I preſume, be more to your purpoſe to avoid an examination

that Lewis had a natural daughter, whom he did not legitimate, but put her into a convent. It being whiſpered to her that ſhe was the King's daughter, ſhe became diſſatisfied and troubleſome to the convent, valuing herſelf on her high birth. Madam de Maintenon, viſiting the convent as if by accident, called for the Lady, repreſented to her the danger of pride, the propriety of humility, and that ſhe ought not to believe herſelf the King's daughter, whatever might be ſaid to her on that ſubject. The young Lady having heard theſe remonſtrances with patience; Madam, ſays ſhe, your ſolicitude to convince me that I am not the King's daughter, is a proof to me that I am. M. Voltaire lays himſelf open to a like anſwer from his readers. The labour he has beſtowed to perſuade us that theſe rejoicings did not proceed from fear, is a proof of its kind that he himſelf believed fear to be the cauſe.

examination of them, and, admitting them as good, to purſue your peruſal. The ſubject here meant is the death of Henrietta Dutcheſs of Orleans.

The characters of Lewis XIV. and of King William are drawn by M. Voltaire with art and elegance. I would add with truth, were it not that I think the author diſcovers a degree of partiality to the former. Lewis, ſays he, made war as a King; William, as a ſoldier. When a King remains at home, makes choice of well qualified generals, ſupports them with a ſufficient number of troops, and theſe properly appointed; in general, if a King, as the firſt mover, be not deficient in any thing that can tend to procure victory or peace on the beſt terms, he may, with propriety, be ſaid to make war as a King. Again, if a King appear in the field at the head of his armies, avoid no fatigue or danger to which his duty in that department may call him; if by his military conduct he pro-

cure ſucceſs, and attract merited applauſe, he will be found to heighten his character as a King, as a general, and as a man. This was the caſe with Guſtavus Adolphus, with Czar Peter I. and is ſo with the preſent King of Pruſſia *.

Lewis XIV. from whoſe character I would not wiſh to detract, was ambitious of military glory. He, therefore, was preſent with his armies, but chiefly at ſieges; and at times viſited the trenches, but did not ſeem inclined to appear much in a field of battle. He commonly returned early from the campaign, was ſaluted with the acclamations of his people every where, paſſed through triumphal arches highly decorated, and loaded with adulatory inſcriptions. This was, indeed, gratifying to one who affected, and ſolicitouſly courted the character of a ſoldier. But, while the poets, and other panegyriſts, ſounded his military fame as ſuperior to that of Caeſar

* Frederick III.

Cæſar or Hannibal, better judges inſinuated that he wore the laurels which his generals had won. M. Voltaire would therefore have marked the military characters of theſe two Kings better, had he ſaid, Lewis made war as a King, and wiſhed to do it as a general; William, as a King, as a general, and as a ſoldier.

In the compariſon of theſe two characters, there is a paſſage in which the author's colouring in favour of Lewis is, if I miſtake not, too ſtrong. "In fine," ſays he, "thoſe who admire the protector "of James more than his perſecutor, will "give the preference to Lewis." To be able to judge of the value of actions, it is neceſſary to know the motives from which they flow. Without undertaking an inquiry into the propriety of the Prince of Orange's deſcent upon Britain, it may ſuffice to obſerve, that ſuch was the diſſatisfaction of the people of England with the meaſures of their King at that period, and

ſuch

ſuch the probability of the diſguſt ſtill increaſing, that there is little reaſon to doubt they would ſoon have ſet Anne upon her father's throne, had not the Prince of Orange aſſerted his wife's right of ſeniority.

About the time of the revolution in England, France was greatly diſtreſſed with heavy taxes, under which the people had groaned for many years. The long wars, the great armies, the number of fortifications, works of enormous expence, and, in general, the King's natural diſpoſition to profuſion, beſides ſome ſevere winters, and unfavourable ſeaſons, productive of dearth, were the cauſes of the calamitous ſtate to which the nation was then reduced. The revocation of the edict of Nantes proved likewiſe an ample ſource of evils, not unforeſeen by the more ſagacious part of the kingdom. Lewis now began to dread war as much as he had courted it twenty years before. He knew the Prince of Orange to be his moſt formidable enemy,

my, whether from his political intercourſe with the other ſtates of Europe, or as a general at the head of an army. He ſaw it would be of ſingular importance to conduct matters ſo as to prevent William from tranſporting troops from Britain to the Continent. For this purpoſe, he ſpared no pains to conciliate James's friends in England and in Ireland to his plans; and, by their co-operation, the war in Ireland was commenced and carried on. Whatever praiſe, therefore, was due to Lewis for his protection of James, it is ſufficiently obvious he could not have purſued a meaſure more conducive to his own intereſt. But how far Lewis, his ſucceſſors, and the court of Verſailles have availed themſelves of this unfortunate family, when they found it ſubſervient to their purpoſes, and deſerted it when its ſervices were no longer of uſe, is well known to all Europe. The compariſon of the characters of William and Lewis, as drawn by M. Voltaire, would bear a ſtill more critical examination,

tion, were it proper to dwell longer upon it.

Among the different nations of Europe, there are none with whom the attachment of the people to their King is ſo ſtrong as in France. Nor is this confined to the populace; we can trace it in the compoſitions of their hiſtorians. M. Voltaire hath ſketched the virtues of Lewis XIV. in ſtrong lines; but, in the relations of his defects and errors, it is not difficult to diſcover a conſiderable degree of palliation. This Monarch, from a general peruſal of M. Voltaire's hiſtory of him, will appear a greater man than he really was, though it will always be allowed that he poſſeſſed many excellent qualities, and particularly thoſe which are ſuited to ſocial life. As a companion, his character is preferable to that of his rival King. He was humane, benevolent, affable, liberal, and ready to forgive injuries. The agreeable familiarity in which he lived with thoſe of his court,

did

did not detract from his dignity. His weakneſſes appear chiefly in yielding too readily to the deſires and dictates of his miniſters, miſtreſſes, and confeſſors; nor were his errors the offspring of his natural diſpoſition, ſo much as of this eaſy compliance. Were we to undertake an inveſtigation of the powers of theſe two Kings in the cabinet, in the political government of a nation, in negotiations with other ſtates, or in the military line, a ſuperficial attention would ſuffice to ſhow the ſuperiority of William's character over that of Lewis.

The age of Lewis XIV. is not a part of M. Voltaire's works in which his ſentiments of religion are to be found. His ſtrictures on Chriſtianity are well known; nor hath he ſpared natural religion where it fell in his way. What I cannot forgive in Voltaire, ſays Lord Cheſterfield, and what is really unpardonable, is the great pains he takes to propagate a doctrine alike pernicious

cious to civil ſociety, and contrary to the general religion of all countries. I am very certain no man is at liberty to attack the foundations of all morality, and to break thoſe ties which are ſo neceſſary, and already too weak to reſtrain mankind within the bounds of duty *.—Thus far this elegant author. I ſhall only obſerve here, that, however Voltaire's ridicule may recommend his volumes to a particular claſs of readers, the more judicious, and, if I be well informed, even ſome whoſe ſentiments of religion coincide with his own, whatever they may think of his wit, cannot, in this particular, applaud his judgment. Having mentioned religion, I ſhall take notice of a paſſage in this hiſtory, in which I think the author hath glanced at Chriſtianity at the expence of truth.

Chriſtina Queen of Sweden having reſigned the crown to her couſin Charles Guſtavus, went to France, and from that to

* Letter to M. Crebillon.

to Inſpruck, where, after a public abjuration of Proteſtant principles, ſhe was initiated in thoſe of the church of Rome. "Indifferent to the one and to the other," ſays M. Voltaire, "ſhe made no ſcruple to "conform in appearance to the ſentiments "of the people among whom ſhe meant "to paſs her life." In 1660, upon the death of Charles, this Queen wiſhed to reſume the crown; but ſhe ſoon found her new religion an inſuperable obſtacle to this meaſure.

It may be here ſaid, that, whatever Chriſtina's ſentiments of religion might be, ſhe would rather drop her pretenſions to a crown, than lay herſelf open to a charge of inſtability, by a ſecond change of religious opinions. This may perhaps be true. I ſhould, therefore, conſider her letters to Madam Dacier as a more convincing proof of her ſincere attachment to the church of Rome. Chriſtina, in her correſpondence with this learned Lady, regrets that ſhe

ſhould remain among heretics, and uſes various arguments to perſuade her to embrace the true faith. What influence theſe letters had upon Madam Dacier, I know not. But both ſhe and her huſband became Roman Catholics afterwards. Theſe circumſtances, we may well believe, were not unknown to M. Voltaire. It is, therefore, ſurpriſing, that he ſhould have taken upon him to aſſert roundly, that this Princeſs could abandon or adopt religious principles, not from conviction, but as ſhe found them occaſionally ſubſervient to her conveniency. Had Chriſtina been alive when this hiſtory was publiſhed, M. Voltaire would probably have received a check, at leaſt as ſevere as that which ſhe gave to M. Bayle, for a leſs offence. Some authors have believed, that ſhe laid down a crown with this only view, that ſhe might be at liberty to embrace the religion of the church of Rome *.

In

* M. Voltaire doth not obſerve, that, by ſuppoſing this Queen to be equally indifferent to Proteſtant and Roman

In M. Voltaire's hiſtory of Lewis XIV. and his ſucceſſor, you will be entertained with

Roman Catholic principles, he makes her both weak and inſincere, contrary to what he aſſerts in the very ſame paſſage. When ſhe came from Rome to Sweden, ſhe was extremely ſollicitous either to reſume the crown, or to be elected Regent during the minority of a child then four years of age. A few days after her arrival, ſhe ordered a chapel to be prepared for the Popiſh worſhip; and, in the face of the nation, went regularly to maſs. She could not poſſibly purſue a meaſure more certain to fruſtrate her deſigns, which accordingly happened. As to her ſincerity, if this conduct be not ſufficient to aſcertain it, let the following paſſage of a letter to Madam Dacier be added to it.——J'éſpere, et je le ſouhaite, avec l'aide de Dieu, qu'un jour les ſaints Auteurs vous perſuaderont, ſi vous les conſultez ſans preoccupation, qu' environ 1500 années avant que les Luthers et les Calvins euſſent renoncé à la vérité tout ce qu'il y avoit de gens raiſonables et grands dans notre monde, etoient auſſi Catholiques que nous le ſommes tous aujourd'hui ici à Rome, et comme l'eſt la plus ſaine et la meilleure partie de votre France. A quoi peut ſervir votre ſcience, ſi vous ignorez ce point ſi important? Donnez vous la peine d'y faire une reflection ſerieuſe, et priez Dieu qu'il ouvre un jour vos yeux et votre coeur à la vérité. *Memoires pour ſervir a l'hiſt. de Chriſtine, &c. 4to, à Amſterdam, &c.* 1751. *Vol.* II. *p.* 189.

with an account of the great events of that long period, related in an elegant and agreeable manner. But, beſides the paſſages which have been the ſubject of theſe few obſervations, there are ſeveral others, in which the author's reaſonings and deductions, if properly examined, would be found not to bear the touchſtone of a critical inveſtigation. If you mean to read more of M. Voltaire's works, I would adviſe you not to enter upon that peruſal, till you have read a publication, entitled, *Les erreurs de Monſieur Voltaire, par l'Abbé Nonnotte;* nor is he the only critic who hath animadverted on M. Voltaire's miſtakes; ſome others, as I am informed, of ſingular abilities, have undertaken this taſk.

LETTER

LETTER LII.

To Hortensia.

THOUGH your character, good Hortenſia, be as remote from the vindictive impetuoſity of Juno's, as my powers are beneath thoſe of Hercules; you, nevertheleſs, ſometimes ſtart doubts, and propoſe queſtions, to the ſolution of which I cannot conſider myſelf as equal; but, as honour, we are told, may ſometimes be derived, even from unſucceſsful attempts, as is ſaid to have been the caſe with Phaeton, rather than give a flat denial, I ſhall hazard an effort, however fruitleſs it may prove. I comply with your deſire the more readily, that your acquaintance with antiquity puts it in the power of your correſpondents to illuſtrate their inveſtigations without reſerve from thoſe remote periods.

What

What ought to be the conduct of a Theiſt *, ſay you, living in a ſociety of Chriſtians? The anſwer here will appear to the greater part of people eaſy and obvious. Truth, it will be ſaid, being ſo valuable and intereſting to mankind, ought never to be concealed. This is indeed plauſible. Mean time, there may be caſes in which it would be improper for one to endeavour to convince others of arguments, for no other reaſon, but becauſe that perſon believes theſe to be truths. Thus, could any one produce what may appear to him unanſwerable arguments againſt the exiſtence of any intelligent being ſuperior to man, the conduct of that perſon would be evidently blameable; ſince the belief of ſuch an exiſtence muſt always be productive of good effects on the human mind, but of none bad. Whereas the influence of a contrary belief, on a mind, not in a ſtate of inſanity,

* The diſtinction between the Theiſt or Deiſt and the Chriſtian is too well known to require an explanation.

ſanity, or of what, the materialiſt * would wiſh to prove, muſt be unfavourable, and the effects invariably bad. The ſame obſervation may be applied to matter and mind. For, were a materialiſt to convince me, that I conſiſt wholly of matter, and that my exiſtence, as a thinking being, ſhall terminate with this life: That perſon, for the preceding reaſons, would do me a real injury, even though he were abſolutely certain of his argument, which, however, from the nature of the thing, is impoſſible.

Where nations have made any progreſs, however ſmall, in civilization, the idea of one or more intelligent beings, ſuperior to man, on whom the regency of the world depends, hath been found conſtantly to obtain. To preſerve this impreſſion on people's minds is conducive to the good of ſociety, and to the ſtability of government. Hence

* Materialiſt, in the ſenſe of Democritus and Epicurus.

Hence religious rites, and modes of worſhip, of various kinds, have been inſtituted; and ſocial worſhip, when properly regulated, hath been deemed a ſure and rational method of impreſſing the mind with ſuch ideas. That the belief of the agency of a ſupreme intelligent Being in the univerſe, muſt be productive of the beſt effects on the human mind, while it cannot have any bad influence whatever, is, I think, too obvious to require a proof; and, conſequently, whoever endeavours to weaken this opinion in the minds of his fellow citizens, doth a real injury to the ſociety to which he belongs.

The theology of the antients, that is, of the Greeks and Romans, is known to have abounded with many abſurdities, and puerile fancies, which being of ſingular utility to the poets, were chiefly propagated by them. Notwithſtanding the inconſiſtencies of that theology, the opinion that the government of the world depends upon the regency

regency of ſuperior Beings had a good effect upon the minds of the people, particularly in the earlier periods of theſe republics, when luxury had not yet corrupted their manners. In thoſe times, when their armies were unſucceſsful, or when any other diſaſter befel the ſtate, this was believed to be a puniſhment from heaven for the vicious manners of the citizens, for the miſconduct of the magiſtrates, or generals, or for ſome other cauſe of offence to the Gods. Feſtivals and ſacrifices were accordingly ordered, the people flocked to the temples, and jointly deprecated the wrath of Heaven; and the more virtuous and ſagacious citizens had thus a fair opportunity of recommending to the people propriety of conduct in their lives and manners. This ſocial worſhip, ariſing from an opinion of a ſuperior power rewarding virtue and puniſhing vice, as it originates from good principles, hath the beſt effect in preſerving them.

In the fables of the Gods, the poets relate many of their actions, which, leading rather to vice than to virtue, ought to be avoided by man. But, from the allegorical fables which were natural and obvious, even the lower claſſes of the people would be led to ſee the other fables to be mere fictions of the poets. Thus, there is hardly a mind ſo void of penetration as not to ſee the propriety of the allegory, that the Goddeſs of Wiſdom was the offspring of Jupiter's brain. Apollo and Diana were the children of Jupiter, and produced at the ſame birth. In other words, the ſun and the moon, conſidered as brother and ſiſter, were the work of the Author of the univerſe. Theſe fables, therefore, we have reaſon to believe, were not ſo apt to miſlead the minds of the people as ſome have thought. Yea, Ovid, whom we would hardly expect to condemn an amour, though in itſelf unlawful, tells us that Byblis had recourſe to the examples of the Gods to conciliate her mind to an unhappy paſſion which

which ſhe had contracted; but the ſame poet, in the following verſes, makes her condemn that paſſion as unlawful, and contrary to the dictates of virtue, notwithſtanding the examples ſhe had juſt before referred to.

Let us now ſuppoſe, in the earlier periods of the Athenian and Roman ſtates, that is, before the revolution of Harmodias and Ariſtogiton in Athens, and before the deſtruction of Carthage by the Romans, that a citizen in either of theſe ſtates had undertaken to convince the people, by irrefragable arguments, that the powers they worſhipped did not exiſt; that temples, ſacrifices, the deprecation of the wrath of the Gods, with other circumſtances relating to public worſhip, were uſeleſs, and wholly impoſitions on their minds. Let this citizen ſucceed ſo far, as to prevail with the people to deſtroy their temples, and not to leave a veſtige of any thing relating to public worſhip: By this ſucceſs of his remonſtrances,

ſtrances, he would have done more miſchief to his reſpective ſtate, than the Tarquins did to the one, or Piſiſtratus to the other. The people, in ſuch circumſtances, would have conſidered themſelves as ſo far emancipated from the obligation to relative duties; and the magiſtrate would conſequently have felt an additional reſiſtance in moving the wheels of government.

If the preceding obſervations be juſt with reſpect to the theology of the antients, ſuch as it was; what ſhall we ſay of a modern ſceptic, were he to ſucceed in his endeavours to extinguiſh a religion, which, by the acknowledgment of its moſt ſanguine adverſaries, recommends the pureſt morality, and that ſupported by the moſt encouraging and rational hopes? If he believe himſelf able, by his arguments, to prevail with every individual in the ſociety to reſtrict himſelf to the religion of nature alone, this Theiſt diſcovers but a ſlender acquaintance with the human mind.

Permit

Permit me here to ſuppoſe myſelf, for once, a mere Theiſt, and to have no other religion but what nature teaches me. I take a view of the various nations which now are, or in former times have been, in the world. I find each of theſe hath a religion of one kind or other, with reſpective rites, and many of them inculcating, not only abſurd doctrines, but immoral practices. Were I poſſeſſed of power ſufficient to annihilate the religion of any of theſe nations, I have no reaſon to doubt that the people of that nation would ſoon find a religion for themſelves, perhaps more immoral than any hitherto known. Whoever hath examined human nature, or hath taken a review of mankind, will hardly doubt of the truth of this obſervation.

The Jews, perhaps more than any other nation, are ſubſervient to the illuſtration of this argument. That people, from the days of Joſhuah to their captivity in Chaldea, a period of about ſix hundred years, had

had only the temple worſhip; which being confined to one part of the country, and their feſtivals happening but ſeldom, came to be neglected by thoſe who lay at a diſtance. Hence the people adopted the idolatrous worſhip of the neighbouring nations, the rites of which were immoral and cruel, the people ſometimes cutting their bodies with ſharp inſtruments, and making their children paſs through the fire to imaginary deities, with other ſuch impious uſages. This was dangerous to the ſtate in different reſpects; for the people, who lay towards the confines of the country, were thus led to contract an attachment to the neighbouring nations, though naturally hoſtile to the Jews, while they became ſchiſmatics to thoſe of their own nation who adhered to the temple worſhip.

After the Babyloniſh captivity, Ezra, and others who took the direction of public affairs, were at pains to read the Moſaic law to the people, not only in Jeruſalem, but

but in all the other cities of the country. For this purpoſe, men properly qualified were ſent from Jeruſalem, with interpreters, to explain the law in the Chaldean tongue, for the people had loſt the Hebrew language. After ſome time, it being found inconvenient to perform this duty in the open air, houſes were built in every city for this purpoſe. Theſe were afterwards called Synagogues. This duty of reading and explaining the Moſaic law to the people was performed at ſtated times, particularly on their Sabbaths. Thus the ſacred and civil inſtitutions of Moſes were preſerved; and the people never again relapſed into idolatry, nor aſſociated with the neighbouring nations. Let us now ſuppoſe a ſceptical Jew to have prevailed with the people to abandon the Moſaic diſpenſation, as burdenſome and abſurd, or by whatever other remonſtrance, that citizen would have merited the denomination of an enemy to his country; for whoever can doubt that this people would have returned to their former

mer idolatry, would be a greater ſceptic than the other.

To apply theſe obſervations to ourſelves, the ſentiments of a learned and ingenious author will be found particularly ſeaſonable. Without any apology, therefore, I ſhall have recourſe to theſe. This accurate critic obſerves, that a ſtrict attention to, and regular attendance on public worſhip, are circumſtances ſingularly intereſting to a ſtate. "The political ſtate," ſays he, "or "civil government of every Chriſtian coun- "try, is no leſs benefited hereby than the "church itſelf: For, as it beſt conduceth "to keep up the ſpirit of religion among "us, and to make every man know his "duty to God, his neighbour, and him- "ſelf; ſo it may be reckoned of all me- "thods the moſt conducive to preſerve "peace and good order in the ſtate. For "hereby ſubjects are taught to be obedient "to their prince and his laws, children to "be dutiful to their parents, ſervants to be

"faithful

" faithful to their maſters, and all to be
" juſt and charitable, and to pay all other
" duties which in every relation they owe
" to one another. In the faithful diſcharge
" of theſe duties, doth the peace, good or-
" der, and happineſs of every community
" conſiſt. To be weekly inſtructed in theſe
" duties, and to be weekly excited to the
" obedience of them, is certainly the pro-
" pereſt and moſt effectual method to in-
" duce men hereto. It may juſtly be
" reckoned, that the good order which is
" now maintained in this kingdom, is
" more owing to this method, than to any
" other now in practice among us for this
" end; and that one good miniſter, by his
" weekly preaching, and daily good ex-
" ample, ſets it more forward than any
" two of the beſt juſtices of the peace can
" by their exacteſt diligence in the execu-
" tion of the laws which they are en-
" truſted with. And it is not to be doubt-
" ed, but that, if this method were once
" dropt among us, the generality of the

" people, whatever elſe may be done to " obviate it, would ſoon relapſe into as " bad a ſtate of barbarity as was ever in " practice among the worſt of our Saxon " or Daniſh anceſtors. Suppoſing, there- " fore, there were no ſuch thing in truth " and reality, as that holy Chriſtian reli- " gion which the miniſters of the goſpel " teach, (as too many among us are now " permitted with impunity to ſay); yet " the ſervice which they do the civil go- " vernment, in keeping all men to thoſe " duties, in the obſervance of which its " peace, good order, and happineſs conſiſt, " may very well deſerve the maintenance " which they receive from it."

It is not the intention of this learned critic to depreciate the character of thoſe who hold offices of juſtice, by ſetting the clerical character in oppoſition to it. All he means is, that a clergyman, when ſucceſsful in his function, operates by the heart and the affections; the officer of juſtice,

ſtice, by the execution of the laws. By the former method, citizens are led to a ſpontaneous diſcharge of relative duties, from a principle of conſcience; by the latter, they are forced to ſubmit to the laws, from a dread of puniſhment.

When I conſider theſe circumſtances, I congratulate myſelf that my lot hath fallen in a country, the religion of which teaches the pureſt morality, having for its baſis the ſimpleſt of all principles, that is, univerſal benevolence. I find its rites nowiſe burdenſome, conſiſting chiefly in addreſſes to, and hymns in praiſe of the Supreme Being, with diſcourſes recommending pious and moral duties. The proportion of time allotted to this I find to be juſt ſufficient, as a periodical relaxation from buſineſs and labour. Were the preſent religion aboliſhed, and wholly forgotten, the probability that the next would be of equal value, is extremely ſmall. It is to be obſerved, that only the morality of religion is here

here underſtood; for the Theiſt is not ſuppoſed to concern himſelf with any thing further. Although, therefore, my creed, according to the ſuppoſition, doth not extend beyond the dictates of Nature, I cannot help conſidering it as my duty to ſupport the preſent religion, eſpecially as in this I have the ſanction of the laws of my country; and, were I to purſue oppoſite meaſures, in lending my aſſiſtance to extinguiſh the religion now eſtabliſhed, I ſhould think myſelf little entitled to the protection of theſe laws, and to the advantages to be derived from the ſociety in which I live. I much queſtion, ſays Lord Cheſterfield *, whether it is allowable for any man to write againſt the worſhip and belief of his own country, even if he were convinced in his own mind that they were not free from error, on account of the diſturbance and diſorder it would occaſion. To this obſervation of Lord Cheſterfield I ſhall add, that even improprieties which have

* Letter to M. Crebillon.

have ſometimes been obſerved in the modes of worſhip, are of little importance, when compared with the advantages ariſing to a ſociety from a general belief of ſuperior agency, and of the reſponſibility of man for his conduct in this life. But theſe impreſſions would ſoon be loſt in the mind, eſpecially with the populace, were it not for the periodical returns of holidays.

If theſe obſervations be admitted as juſt, it may be aſked, from what motive a Theiſt can be diſpoſed to undermine the religion of his country? It hath been ſaid, that Chriſtianity, at different periods, hath proved a cauſe of much evil, as diſſention among its followers, maſſacres, and tedious and deſtructive wars. This is indeed a truth. But, by a proper examination of the matter, it will hardly be doubted that this proceeds from a vitiation in human nature. A moderate acquaintance with hiſtory will ſatisfy any unprejudiced mind, that animoſities among mankind,

war,

war, bloodſhed, and every kind of vice, prevailed in the world before the introduction of Chriſtianity into it, at leaſt as much as ſince that aera. The human mind diſcovers a remarkable fecundity in finding out cauſes of miſchief, to produce proofs of which here is unneceſſary. For this purpoſe, a review of the ſtate of Europe at this moment would ſuffice. If more be deemed requiſite, while I am occupied in theſe obſervations, war is carried on with great violence in the four quarters of the earth, and one part of mankind is running round the globe after another, with ſerious intentions each to deſtroy the other, if fortune or misfortune ſhall bring them together. In all this, religion hath no ſhare. An impartial judge will readily allow, that, whoever hath recourſe to war, or to violent meaſures of any kind, in order to defend or propagate his principles, ſets himſelf in direct oppoſition to thoſe of Chriſtianity, which every where teaches benevolence, charity, obedience to laws, a mild ſubmiſ-

ſion

ſion to the government under which we live, and even to bear injuries without reſiſtance.

With reſpect to the ſentiments of ſome others concerning the motives which have induced Theiſts to make a tax on religion, I leave you to judge. An affectation of powers of mind more penetrating than thoſe of their contemporaries, hath been aſcribed by ſome as a motive for this conduct. Others would tell us, that authors, wiſhing to recommend their volumes to as many readers as poſſible, know well, that, according to the preſent ſtate of things, none are read with more avidity than thoſe in which violent or artful attacks upon religion are to be found. We have, indeed, no reaſon to doubt, but one will naturally have recourſe to volumes which tend to lull the mind when labouring under a conſciouſneſs of immoral conduct.

LETTER

LETTER LIII.

To Lælius.

I Have obſerved in others, as well as in you, a deſire to know the hiſtory of that antient period which furniſhed the poets ſo amply with ſubjects of fables. This is chiefly the caſe, while the acquiſitions of the ſchool are ſtill freſh in the mind. The period here meant is about a thouſand years preceding the commencement of the Olympiades. But, though the Grecian, Egyptian, and Aſſyrian hiſtories of thoſe remote times had been conveyed entire to us from their reſpective authors, there is too good reaſon to believe we would have found them ſo charged with poetical fiction as to have merited but little credit. It may be obſerved, however, that, in ſome hiſtories of a later date, the limits

between

between fable and truth may, without difficulty, be marked, eſpecially ſuch parts of the hiſtory as are particularly intereſting.

Poetry was of greater antiquity than hiſtory, and, being believed of divine origin, was in high eſtimation in the early ages. The hiſtorians, therefore, to give the greater dignity to their hiſtories, and in compliance with the credulity of mankind in thoſe times, interſperſed fables with truth. Hence Macrobius makes a proper diſtinction between *fabula* and *narratio fabuloſa*; by the former, underſtanding pure or unmixed fable; by the latter, a mixture of fable and hiſtorical truth. Æſop hath been reckoned the father of fable, not that he was the firſt fabuliſt, but becauſe his fables have no relation to hiſtorical facts or events; whereas thoſe of Homer and of Heſiod, being the fables of the Gods, relate to perſonages who are ſuppoſed to have lived in former times. The fables of Æſop being purely moral, this author was not baniſhed

from the ideal republic of Plato, as Homer and Heſiod were; the fables of the Gods, according to the ſentiments of this philoſopher, being more apt to lead to vicious than to virtuous actions.

Hecataeus the Mileſian, who flouriſhed about the ſixty-fourth Olympiad, upwards of five hundred years before the Chriſtian aera, is ſaid to have been the firſt who ſtripped hiſtory of poetical fiction. Others aſcribe this to Pherecydes. It may appear ſurpriſing that this ſeparation ſhould have happened ſo late. But this is like many other diſcoveries which we are apt to conſider as obvious after they are made, though we ourſelves ſhould not perhaps have attended to them, had we lived before. Tragedy and comedy are widely different from, and, in ſome reſpects, oppoſite to one another, and yet their ſeparation was wholly owing to an accident; for Æſchylus, in reforming the Athenian ſtage, threw out the rude ſatire with which the drama had abounded

bounded before that time, if we can ſuppoſe it then to have merited the denomination of drama. But the populace, pleaſed to ſee the moſt wealthy citizens ſatirized, retained the compoſitions of the former ſtyle; whence aroſe comedy, while the more dignified repreſentations of Æſchylus terminated in tragedy.

Notwithſtanding the obſcurity of the Mythic times, we can gather from the fables of the poets three diſtinct characters, all of them memorable, as being ſubſervient to the felicity of mankind. The firſt of theſe were the heroes, who, not unlike the knights of chivalry in later times, devoted themſelves to oppoſe or deſtroy the oppreſſors of mankind who lived on rapine. Hercules and Theſeus ſeemed to claim the firſt rank in this claſs. The ſecond character is that of the inventors and improvers of the arts. Triptolemus is celebrated for his improvements in agriculture. Chiron taught the uſe of ſimples in the diſeaſes of the human body,

and

and likewiſe in thoſe of horſes and other animals that are uſeful to man. He ſtudied aſtronomy, and taught the uſe of the ſtars in nautical adventures. Æſculapius, the ſcholar of Chiron, rendered himſelf famous by his knowledge in medicine. Daedalus improved mechanics, by the invention of the ſaw, and ſeveral other tools. He is likewiſe ſaid to have been the firſt who applied ſails to ſhips.

The legiſlators make the third claſs. Orpheus, Linus, and Amphion, diſtinguiſhed themſelves by the civilization of their reſpective ſtates. They are ſaid to have excelled in muſic; and the poets have feigned the two former to be the ſons of Apollo, and of ſome one or other of the Muſes. Amphion, we are told, built the walls of Thebes by the ſound of his harp alone. The apologue here is obvious. Poetry, as we have obſerved, being held of divine origin, their laws were delivered to the people, like the reſponſes of oracles, in poetical

tical numbers, being thus more eaſily retained in the memory.

It may be obſerved here, that the philoſophers who diſtinguiſhed themſelves by legiſlation, eſpecially thoſe who had ſtudied under the Egyptian prieſts, believed and taught the exiſtence of one univerſal intelligent being, the cauſe and ſupporter of all things; that the human mind is a ray or emanation from this univerſal ſpirit; and that thoſe who are qualified to inſtruct the reſt of mankind, and point out the way to happineſs, have a more immediate intercourſe with the Supreme exiſtence. Aſſuming, therefore, the poetical licences, ſo common in thoſe early times, they doubted not to advance ſupernatural authority, and the ſanction of heaven, for their laws and doctrines. It was probably by impreſſing the minds of the people with theſe opinions, that the three legiſlators juſt mentioned were ſo ſucceſsful in civilizing their countrymen.

Be

Be this as it may, we are ſure it was the caſe ſome centuries afterwards. Pythagoras, having ſecreted himſelf for ſome time from ſociety, in order to digeſt his philoſophical principles, gave out upon his appearance, that he had been with a deity, by whom he was taught moral maxims, for the behoof of mankind. Numa Pompilius, and Zoroaſter, under which laſt ſome ſuppoſe Pythagoras to have ſtudied, delivered their laws and moral principles to the people under the ſame ſanction. Zamolxis, the ſcholar of Pythagoras, and Lycurgus, the Spartan legiſlator, are ſaid to have uſed the ſame licence. Even Socrates, who lived many years after the lateſt of theſe, and had never been in Egypt, perhaps hardly out of Attica, gave out that he was taught his morals and regimen of life by a Genius.

As truth, more than any other circumſtance, adds a value to hiſtory, we cannot, without reluctance, accommodate the mind

to

to hiſtorical truths clothed in a poetical dreſs. In the early ages of antiquity, when any piece of hiſtory was to be exhibited as an exemplar of moral virtue, they ſeem, in thoſe remote times, to have held a bare relation of facts, ſuch as modern hiſtory, inſufficient for the purpoſes intended. The ornaments of poetry were deemed neceſſary to render it more powerful in commanding the paſſions, and in attracting the affections of the mind. The book of Job is a compoſition of this kind; the whole drama of which, making allowance for the Oriental hyperbole, is bold, majeſtic, and ſublime. This poetical piece of hiſtory ſeems to have been intended to teach us, that natural evils, though of the heavieſt kinds, are not always the offspring of moral evil, nor meant as its puniſhment, but are intended as a probation and refinement of the human mind in this life.

Without dwelling longer on this ſubject, you may conſult Strabo's obſervations on

on the univerſal uſe of fables in the early ages of the world. This author, in his firſt book, remarks, that all children are fond of fables; but ignorant people, or even ſuch as have acquired a ſmall tincture of inſtruction, however advanced in years, are, with reſpect to their minds, to be conſidered as in a ſtate of childhood; and, therefore, inſtruction is more happily conveyed to them under the dreſs of fable than otherwiſe *. The ſame author obſerves, that, not only legiſlators, and they who laid the foundations of ſtates, but even hiſtorians and naturaliſts, left their writings either interſperſed with, or under the maſk of fables †.

* Omnes idiotae, et doctrinarum expertes, quodammodo pueri appellandi ſunt, et pariter fabularum avidi; ſimiliter et qui mediocriter inſtructi ſunt.

† Haec ab illis accepta fuere qui rerum publicarum inſtitutionem facientes, &c.——Priſci quoque hiſtorici atque phyſici per fabulas ſcripta ſua reliquere.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page 50. Line 12. for *while* r. *which*
—— 62. —— 15. for *in* r. *of*
—— 167. —— 21. for *not have* r. *not to have*
—— 323. —— 11. for *architectory* r. *architectonic*
—— 527. —— 6. for *a tax* r. *attacks*
—— 531. —— 18. for *ſeemed* r. *ſeem*